MAD ANTHONY'S DRUMMER

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REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN

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MAD ANTHONY'S DRUMMER

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
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TORONTO

There, only a few paces away—a man with a leveled musket.

MAD ANTHONY'S DRUMMER

BY
REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN

Illustrated by
THOMAS FOGARTY

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1929

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SET UP BY BROWN BROTHERS LINOTYPERS
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TO

JACKIE COOGAN

IN OUR LATEST ART, THE SAMMY GRUGER OF
OUR EARLIEST HISTORY

12928

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MAD ANTHONY'S DRUMMER

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CHAPTER I

BEFORE THE DAWN

1779——

July 14th——

A faint gray light, the earliest herald of the sun, began to pick out once familiar objects, but lent them no more than a ghostly likeness to their true selves.

Nor was this pre-morning enchantment in disaccord with the scene whereon it wove its spell. Across all the battlefields of the American Revolution, the Colonies' cause swayed in desperate deadlock with the veteran armies of the British Crown. Over the little outpost at Sandy Beach, between the hills and the Hudson, a night of oppressive heat had ended with that chill which, in these valleys, precedes even the most torrid of approaching days. It bit into the marrow of men and officers, but it bit no deeper than the sleep-destroying realization of their present crisis.

A lanky lad was stealing along the rear of the camp. He crouched in the lee of a tent until a weary sentry passed. The sentry was too disgruntled to have cared, even had he seen the boy; but the boy skilfully avoided attention. Anyhow, he was merely seeking information that the whole camp ached badly to learn.

Its situation was desperate:

King George's Sir Harry Clinton had long been ravaging the Connecticut coast. His campaign was threatening disaster to New England and a consequent collapse of morale into absolute and irretrievable surrender among the other colonies.

One sole means of stopping Clinton remained. This was that the army of the Continental Congress, based to the south of him, should enter Connecticut from the west, thus compelling him to abandon his depredations by drawing him inland and forcing him to meet it in open fight.

But a British force barred that avenue of approach. By holding Stony Point, they formidably controlled the Hudson.

Washington, from his main army stationed along the North River, had sent, upriver to Sandy Beach, this expedition of infantry under Anthony Wayne, and cavalry commanded by "Light Horse Harry" Lee, with orders to rest here, fourteen short miles south of the invading enemy.

"You will there remain, and thence reconnoiter. When, or if, I deem your findings suitable for such an event, you will receive my permission to assault the British position on Stony Point; but, lacking such permission, you are to make no provocative gesture."

So ran the General's directions.

Light Horse Harry made a noise—well, like one who has reached the limit of exasperation: he always lived close to that limit. Anthony Wayne, for *his* part, had vented his own strictly military, but never too easy, temper by increasing discipline throughout the whole of his little garrison.

The rank and file boiled; even the minor officers muttered discontent. Everybody wanted to attack that virtually impregnable hill of Stony Point, no matter what its strength had been proved to be.

"Gotta do *some*thing!" said the boy, now starting across the rear of the camp. "I don't believe things would be so bad—if we only *tried*."

For the directed reconnoiterings had been made, and the boy knew all too well the reported results of them. Who did not, when the entire expeditionary force was vocal on the subject?

Scouts had been sent out. Each one of them came back with the same statement concerning those Stony Point fortifications which had, in happier days not long passed, been held by the Colonials themselves:

"Building operations going on at fever heat; their nature and extent, however, impossible to discover, because the hill crest is too well guarded—double rows of abatis prevent any attempt at careful observation."

Spies, then, were sent out, too. Ominously, these did not return at all.

The rest?

The rest was fatiguing days of inactivity, or useless tasks set his soldiers by Anthony Wayne merely to maintain discipline—nights when the utmost token of life among the otherwise well-nigh invisible British forces was an occasional rocket arching from the fort to signal to the English ships or smaller craft in the river or to convey some message to that other British garrison which held the village and fort of Verplanck's on the opposite shore.

What wonder that Wayne's officers fretted? What

wonder that his men fumed? Far below there, so far out of sight that he seemed to have shut them out of his mind, Washington remained silent. He would neither order nor sanction the desired advance.

Well, only the other day there had been dispatched to him a written appeal for permission to attack: that was common gossip. The answer should have arrived some time during last night, and this boy could not wait reveille to learn if it had indeed come, and, if so, what its purport was.

He had mastered long ago every trick involved in avoiding trouble with the sentries. He often came here at this hour of the morning for another purpose—to find his own particular friend, run the guard, and go a-fishing. Now he peeped cautiously around the tent, staring through the early twilight at the old log farmhouse some fifty yards distant, until presently there emerged therefrom, noiselessly, another lad.

The original prowler signaled, one long arm raised overhead, then both arms flying from one position to another. A moment's pause followed, whereafter the second prowler replied in kind.

It was part of a complicated formula, but entirely intelligible to the pair engaged in it: the light was just sufficient to make those limb movements as distinct as shadows on a candle-lighted wall at night. Samuel Gruger, the first of the boys, scuttled to the log-house and, soon around a safe corner, where the sentry would not pass, was munching the extra rations which Bill Blunston, his crony, could always inveigle from the headquarters cook.

"Any news?" asked Sam through the large preliminary bite.

Bill—short, plump, and as slack of uniform as he dared to be—looked as if he had slept in his clothes. Neither his perpetual grin nor the glint of his round china-blue eyes could distract attention from rumpled sun-faded hair with an incorrigible cowlick—from wrinkled, unbuttoned blouse—from the solidly comfortable arch of stomach straining against the leather strap of his belt.

"It's a-all wite," he stuttered: "I've f-found out at last where the j-j-am's kept."

"Humph!"

Gruger presented a sharp contrast to his comrade. A Pennsylvania Dutchman newly enlisted, he always worked hard with a recalcitrant appearance to make himself the thorough soldier.

He knew he was awkwardly tall for his age, and too thin—that his eyes were undeniably green—and that his face was a mass of freckles. The warts on his hands defied heroic jackknife surgery however often applied. To his elder campmates, and especially to sullen Eben Jones, Sam's brick-red top was an everlasting joke belligerently resented by its victim.

Yet he strove desperately to overcome these defects through attainment of a military bearing and by a scrupulous care of his regimentals—regimentals none too hopeful to begin with. He would break regulations, but he did study them; he would gratefully accept surreptitious food procured by questionable means, but he bent his mind to thinking of matters more impor-

tant, and showed a high disapproval of his companion's slovenly appearance.

"You fair give me the fantods," he now continued. "Can't you *ever* look soldierly?"

He spoke sharply. Nevertheless, he failed to keep out of his voice the friendliness that he never ceased, at bottom, to feel for Bill, and he continued to bite ravenously into the provisions provided for him.

"Well," Bill reminded him, after a critical gaze, "I've more'n once t-told you *your* f-face wouldn't t-take first p-pr-prize for beauty anywhere you sh-showed it."

Sam got out of that argument. "I don't mean just your looks, Bill, though they're bad enough to scare the crows away. You don't think about your country. What I want is news from Washington; and when I ask for it, you talk about things to eat."

"If you don't l-like to eat, you can h-hand me b-b-back that s-sn-snack of ham. I've a p-place to put it."

The ham was not surrenderd; Sam merely pressed his inquiries. He generally picked up a good deal of information in his own professional capacity as headquarters drummer boy. Bill, however, was still more advantageously placed. In spite of his almost invariably unkempt appearance, he had, for compensating abilities, managed to obtain and hold the post of Anthony Wayne's orderly.

"Aw, tell me!"

They were seated on the dew-drenched ground, legs outstretched, backs propped against the logs of the farmhouse. Overhead, the sky grew gradually to a deep pink.

"T-tell you what?"

"You know."

They spoke in whispers, lest their voices should carry to the interior of the house. Bill took a great chew of the loaf of bread that he gripped, and his china-blue eyes blinked innocently:

"*D-don't* know."

"Yes, you do, too. Did the message come?"

"What message?"

"*The* message—the one from North River, of course. What was in it, Bill? Have we got leave to attack?"

Blunston shook his tumbled head. His mouth was too full for vocal reply.

"You mean to tell me"—Sam's greenish eyes narrowed—"that it really hasn't got through to us even yet?"

Bill nodded assent.

"But it ought to've. What will the men say when they hear it hasn't?"

Chawing vigorously, Blunston continued to nod.

"Bill, did the spies get it?"—The country between Sandy Beach and New York was infested by enemy agents, and these boys used to see a spy in every farmhand they passed along the roads.

At last the plumper lad was getting the better of that stale bread. He swallowed hard; he did not rid his mouth of all that was in it, but he did clear it sufficiently to let out a sound rather like the "no" he intended it to be.

"My eye! Then what——"

"D-don't know, I'm telling you." The speaking

machinery was clear at last. "The officers b-believe no answer's b-b-been sent. Light Horse Harry's f-f-rightful angry. Raging around, he is—just raging. And W-Wayne's near crazy."

"He ought to be: it's disgraceful, making us stay here forever this way. They both ought to be crazy. So'm I. So's everybody."

The pair resumed eating and so continued for a few minutes in silence. Then Sam spoke:

"Bill?"

"Uh-huh."

"If *I* was Wayne——"

"You a-ain't."

Sammy had been about to announce that, if he were Wayne, he would wait no longer; permission or no permission, he would advance, colors flying, upon impregnable Stony Point at once. As it happened, however—since he wasn't Wayne—he moved as suddenly in another direction.

For the sun jumped the eastern horizon, and a bugle sounded. Reveille!

Stuffing a last portion of ham into his mouth, Gruger ran pellmell toward his own quarters. A nasal voice from inside the farmhouse penetratingly summoned Bill, and Bill obeyed it.

For five minutes, silence reigned again, as over a desert. Then came a rattle of drums, and the camp was officially alive for another day.

CHAPTER II

A BLOW FOR A BULLY

Roll-call summons snapped out. The post's quadrangle filled with men as if by magic. The Light Infantry formed in separate companies around three sides of the open square, with the now dismounted cavalry occupying the fourth side. Blunston remained quite invisible, because Wayne, his chief, was otherwise engaged during roll call and always needed his orderly's sweating services at that time. Sam, on the other hand, lined up, drumless, with the rest of the headquarters troop.

A lugubrious lot they were—a lugubrious lot was the whole force. All the world over, and all history through, fighting men complain; they grumble whenever they are not fighting: that is an unfailing token of the good soldier, and there is no general who would not regard askance an ever-contented army. But these first Americans had real reasons for their sour faces and low-voiced protests.

They were, most of them, practically barefoot; they were ill-armed; they were underfed. Quartermaster and commissary supplies were inadequate in degree and poor in quality; and everybody, from the oldest non-commissioned officer to the newest private, was irked to open anger by their long-enforced inaction at a point so close to the enemy.

"Attention!"

In buff and blue—tattered, yet scrupulously clean—the headquarters company responded to that order from spruce Richard Butler. Because Sam appeared in line well-groomed and immaculate, Private Eben Jones, the cross-eyed and pock-marked bully of them all, maliciously heeled the boy's shins and disarranged his white leggings.

Gruger flushed a beet-red. Out of one corner of his mouth, he whispered:

"Some time you'll play that trick once too often—and then I'll try to lick you for it!"

He would have no chance of success—he was well aware of that—but, at the moment, he didn't care. Jones was a tormentor born and never chose as victim anybody of his own size. His favorite targets of ridicule were Bill Blunston's stutter and Sam Gruger's flaming hair; his choicest delight was to provoke the pair's rage—and then to cow it. When all other amusements palled, Eben could at least manage to spoil a uniform.

He now grinningly replied:

"Any day 'at suits you, Redtop."

Sam started an unguarded response.

"Silence in the ranks!" shouted quick-eared Captain Butler.

Across the compound, Lieutenant Gibbon, always maintaining a masterful air, was addressing that company of which he had recently been put in charge. Over there on the other side, dashing Lieutenant Knox was reading from a paper to another company. The roll of the headquarters men was called:

"Sherman?"
"Here!"
"McClay?"
"Here!"
"Gruger?"
"Here!" . . .

Whereafter, as the red sun rose higher and higher, and as the last relief of the night air retreated before the fast advancing heat, Captain Butler, in his turn, produced a paper.

"What now?" sneered Eben Jones, under his breath.

Butler read:

"Sandy Beach,
"July 14, 1779.

"A barber having been provided for each company, for the purpose of shaving the soldiers and dressing their hair, who is allowed four pence per man per week, out of his wages, and this barber's services having been taken proper advantage of, the commanding-officer announces that he is determined to punish every man who comes on parade with a long beard, or slovenly hair, as severely as for neglect of his arms.

"The commander regrets the necessity of repeating his orders about attendance upon the barber, but men must at all times be clean and fit for service. Therefore, henceforth officers will, on their separate responsibilities, consider it their duty to see that those soldiers in their respective commands appear always washed, shaved, and their hair oiled, plaited and powdered.

"ANTHONY WAYNE,
"Commanding."

Butler ceased and, folding the document, thrust it in his belt.

A distinct murmur of disapproval passed down the

line. No captain could have helped hearing it; this one's cheeks slightly reddened. His chin went up; his eyes swept the rows of rigid men before him. He added in his driest tones:

"It is naturally beholden upon any headquarters company to set an example to the other commands. I shall, I warn you all, enforce this order to the letter, and any least infringement will prove certain to entail condign punishment." He paused. Again his gaze scoured the set faces that he confronted. Then he turned quickly on his heel. "Sergeant-major, dismiss your men!"

They fell out, their murmurings rising in force now that the Captain had left them. Eben Jones swung around to Sam, exactly as if all that had just been said were Gruger's fault.

"That there ag'un!" drawled the bulldozer, who was impelled to his words by a thorough knowledge of his hearer's admiration for Anthony Wayne. "Beau Tony still tryin' to make macaroni-dandies out'n us on our heads an' faces when the pinch-penny Congress in Philadelphy won't so much as let us have shoes for our feet!"

Sammy bit a lip and held his tongue. But this only spurred Eben.

"What with drill and sentry-go," he persisted, "an' all for naught, too, as every mother's son of us well knows—what with them things, all devised to make niggers out'n us who enlisted for a fight, how much time de *we* git for hair-slickin' an' primpin' in general? Stand up like a man, and answer me that, Redhead!"

He was a veteran soldier, this cross-eyed Eben. As

a young fellow, men said, he had fought with Braddock before Fort Duquesne, fought well, and he had an instinctive habit of subservience before any military superior. Sam, however, was no superior, and, under Jones' automatic obedience in the presence of officers, the boy guessed that the man concealed a mutinous mind. Among his military equals he was, in any case, a trouble-brewing malcontent.

"Oh, hold your jaw!" said Sammy, but he drew back a quick step out of fist-reach.

He knew—that strong-box of gossip, Bill Blunston, had often told him—that there existed queer tales about this man: tales which, if correct, ran to far greater depths than casual insubordination and minor mutiny.

Back in the sixties and in Pennsylvania, Jones was said to have been numbered among Parson Elder's Paxtang Boys, when they surprised peaceful Indian Town on the Susquehanna, and cut the throats, in cold blood, of its sleeping, unarmed red men and women who had always been friendly to their white neighbors of the Proprietor's Manor. Moreover, Bill vowed he had heard, on some seemingly good authority, how Eben once served a term in a Philadelphia jail for robbing an old Quakeress, after first having beaten the poor creature nearly to death.

Nor was even this all. Only five years gone, a young fellow named Jacob Zook had been found murdered along the river's bank near Peach Bottom, back there. His assassin was never certainly known, yet Bill declared the police were not yet satisfied that a mysterious "Owen Jones," with whom Zook had last

been seen alive—and who immediately disappeared—wasn't uncommonly like one Eben Jones.

A bad lot—if all were true. Even if only the half were true, a perilous person for any lad to provoke!

Yet, having spoken, Sam at least retreated no farther.

"Why can't you hold your jaw?" he repeated.

But that chronic sneer cut still more severely into Eben's pock-marked cheek:

"And for why should I hold my jaw, little laddie? Wherefore must I keep mum in the face of the likes o' you?" The fellow moved so as to bar any attempt from Sam to strike out directly for headquarters. "If this here Wayne's anything exceptin' a parade-an'-parlor officer, why don't he lead us ag'in' Stony Point? That's what the whole army—aye, an' the whole country—wants to know: *why?*"

By this time, Sam's face was nearly purple, but, as he held his ground, he tried also to keep the rein upon the worst of his temper and the shield before the worst of his fears.

"You know the reason well enough," he said. "Wayne has orders from General Washington not to attack yet."

"Oh, I do know it, do I?"

"Everybody does."

"Has orders to sit still, has he?"

"Just that: not to dare move his men until he gets word from the North River."

"So Wayne *says,* little laddie. Orders from Washington. But aren't they, mebbe, from his hairdresser, now? That there hairdresser's an interferin' officer,

eh? You'd ought to agree wi' me, Sammy, even if you *be* one o' Wayne's pets; you'd oughtn't to love a man that holds by hairdressers: no amount o' powder an' rations' grease'll ever make *your* headlamp look a mite less'n a carrot."

It was true that Wayne had his favorites, and true that Sam and good-natured, happy-go-lucky Bill Blunston were just now among them. It was equally true, though, that no presumptions were ever permitted and that partiality never interfered with justice in Wayne's command. A portion of Eben's taunt, then, might have passed harmless, and the accusation about the force's inactivity and delay was almost negligible in this sorely tried camp, whatever folks back home might think of it. But hulking Jones did not stop there; as if to emphasize his criticism of Sam's ginger hair, he pointed at it with a jeering finger. He lurched suddenly forward and, describing a jaunty gesture, he brushed off the boy's hat, and pulled brusquely at the handiest lock thereupon presented.

That was the last straw. Before Sam Gruger could consider consequences, he found that he was committing himself. His right elbow drew back. Instantly, his right fist shot forward. It landed squarely upon Eben's sneering mouth.

The compound was full of soldiers dismissed from roll call and idling about, exchanging complaints, until the mess call should sound. A moment since, not one of them had seemed to be taking the faintest interest in a verbal dispute between a brawny man and a beardless boy. But on the instant that the argument became physical, matters substantially altered. Almost

as that fist went home, those two combatants became the center of a human ring eager for any relief from camp monotony.

Jones, reeling under the blow, staggered against close-pressing bodies. When Sam looked involuntarily toward headquarters, it was hidden from him by massed faces, lean, grinning, gloatingly expectant of witnessing a one-sided fight.

The audience was already calling encouragement and inciting the principals, as loafers, anxious for any sort of action in which they themselves are not concerned, urge a couple of street curs to undertake battle:

"Go for him, Torchtop!"

"Will you take a blow and do nothing, Eben?"

"Or will you give a blow in return, Jones?"

Eben drew his bullet head between his shoulders and raised his knotted hands: they looked to Sam like twin sledgehammers. The fellow's upper lip had been cut by the boy's fist; blood trickled over the pock-marked chin, and it did not make the wounded man look less savage. As he slowly advanced to the attack, his crossed eye nearly hid itself behind his nose.

Without being told, Sam understood that there could, in the ordinary course of events, be only one end to this contest. Even taller than bamboo Gruger, and more than proportionately broad, Eben possessed all the advantages of both physique and experience. Still, the boy would not now have run away had the walls of flesh and blood that surrounded him allowed it. The very unfairness of the odds against him increased his anger. It flared in his lean cheeks until

it blotted out all their freckles. With head high and green eyes blazing, he, too, stepped a pace forward just as his enemy advanced.

Somebody laughed:

"Reckon you won't make more'n a single mouthful for him, Redhead!"

"I'm not afraid, anyhow," Sam declared—and declared it truthfully. He had no fear left in him. "That's more than you could say, I bet you. I guess I can take what's——"

There came loud voices from outside the ring: insistent voices. Spectators turned, spectators were jostled aside, spectators were pushed into the otherwise cleared circle, by the sudden crowding of men behind them.

"Look out—look out!"

Startled soldiers cried that. Lieutenant Gibbon, the masterful, beat his way through with the flat of his sword.

"Fall back there! Fall back!" he ordered. "Make way, all of you.—Here comes the General!"

CHAPTER III

AT THE HOLE IN THE WALL

Right and left, at the circle's rim, men bore back against those behind them, who pushed as far forward as possible for a view of the visitor. Elbows dug into ribs, shoulder-points prodded chests, and protests rang out unrestrainedly:

"Let me see!"

"You're on my toes!"

"Keep yourself to yourself, Joe!"

"Don't crowd!"

"Leave off pushing me, Harry Walsh!"

So the circle changed form—ceased to be a circle. It now became twin lines that swayed excitedly face to face across a narrow lane. It became a gangway. It became at last almost orderly.

Sam saw his enemy glowering near one instant, but lost him the next. It happened as magically as if Lieutenant Gibbon were a wizard, and as if his really harmless sword were a wand.

"Give way—give way, man!"

The officer passed on; but every soldier snapped to attention ere that departure was complete, for here, followed by two weary mounted aides, came riding on a gray horse a cloaked figure—cloaked for military exactitude, and not against this torrid weather!—and it

was a figure that all knew and all respected. Although there were generals and to spare in the Continental army, for officers and men alike that term "The General" meant none except General George Washington.

"Now something will happen!"

"Ain't it just his way, coming like this here when nobody expected him?"

"Ain't it, though?"

Gruger forgot his own fight so completely that he might never have been engaged in it—the entire crowd forgot it, except perhaps the vanished Eben—upon the advent of the Commander-in-Chief, whose fondness for surprise visits to his outposts brought him this morning, for the first time, to discontented Sandy Beach. The boy, tall as he was, rose to his tiptoes.

Newly joined, he had never seen Washington before. He had, even at the present juncture, no more than a glimpse, because the pace of the passersby was rapid: spurs—boots—that unnecessary cloak swathing everything, moreover, to a point well above the chin—left hand holding the double reins—right hand at salute before the cocked hat. Of the face, little beyond an aquiline nose thus remained visible.

Only a glimpse before the riders had passed. But it was enough to whet enthusiastic curiosity still further.

The human lane closed upon the riders' rear. Elbowing disorder resumed its sway.

Sam struggled to the front. There must exist some means of satisfying himself without waiting for the review, which, because of the General's arrival, was bound to follow mess. What had become of Bill Blunston?

There he was!

In front of the farmhouse, tiny and tumbledown, which Wayne used as his headquarters, a group of shabby but alert officers were receiving Washington. Bill's position as an orderly permitted his presence on the outskirts, and he made full use of it. He was gaping at the approaching horsemen.

Some two hundred yards divided the lads, with the august visitors between them. Sam shamelessly made a trumpet of his palms; leaning far forward, he bellowed his loudest:

"Ho-o-o—*Bill!*"

His companions tried to silence him. They wanted no disrespectful noises at such a time. Sam, however, merely repeated his call:

"Ho-o-o—*Bill!*"

Other noises there were, but Sam's cry, launched in the tone of the Pennsylvania countryfolk when they hailed a ferryman, triumphed over all of these. Blunston heard, recognized the call, looked searchingly at the gaping spectators. Sam waved his arms until he was identified.

Bill nodded a ready understanding: he knew what was wanted. With his superiors around him, he dared make no verbal reply, but first raised one hand high and straight overhead, next pointed to the oncoming Washington, then to the farmhouse, and at last engaged in an extraordinary and jerky waving upward and downward of his pudgy arms.

Gruger watched this performance carefully until its conclusion. Thereupon, in much the same extraordi-

nary upward and downward dumb code, he hurriedly waved a reply.

It was all a rudimentary type of something that every modern soldier has to be acquainted with: the semaphore system. But at this time it was the possession of frontier huntsmen, a science practically unknown in strictly military circles, and the present form of it was these boys' own invention. They had begun it for use at close quarters when among their comrades, who bantered Bill about his stutter and his tendency to change an initial "r" into a "we": a simple vertical downward gesture of the right arm indicated that direction, thus saving Blunston from saying "wite" when he meant "right"; a few other gestures conveyed those other words over which, when he spoke them, he had the most trouble. Gradually, however, the code was developed, as a sort of game, for more complicated and long-range conversations. This system he had just now used to telegraph silently his friend:

"Pay attention!—Right side of farmhouse, behind Wayne's room: loose boards there. Slip away quietly —meet me there during messtime."

That time was not long distant; the breakfast call sounded invitingly while Sam was signaling his agreement. He was still normally hungry, but hunger was not to be considered at such a moment—and he was on intimate terms with the cooks in the mess kitchen. He disappeared from the crowd of soldiers as a snowflake melts into the ocean. Within five minutes he had reappeared mysteriously at the appointed spot behind

the farmhouse, panting, and his face as red as a geranium.

"Is this the place you meant?"

There was nobody else about except Bill. He crouched there with china-blue eyes wide.

"C-course it is! Thought you weren't ever c-coming!"

"Nobody could have come quicker, but I had to arrange so's I wouldn't be missed at mess. Won't *you* be missed inside here? They might want you 'most any minute, I should think."

"It's all wite for me if I'm w-within call, and I c-c-can hear Wayne from here 's if we were in that very room with him."

Bill indicated a part of the wall where one of the old logs had rotted away, leaving a hole through which, if they bent low enough, the boys could quite readily view the interior. That old hut—it was little more—stood, somewhat askew, at a corner of the compound, and, during the men's mess, nobody would be likely to observe the observers.

"They're in there now—Wayne an' W-Washington. Kneel d-d-down."

Together, orderly and drummer knelt, the carrot head pressed close to the head of sun-faded brown. Timidly, they looked inside.

They saw a severe room. It was furnished solely by a thin mattress, straw-stuffed, on the bare planks of the floor—a camp desk cluttered with papers—two or three high stools. By peering their utmost, they could also see now one and now the other of the couple of occupants.

At the open desk, Wayne sat, somewhat bellicose of attitude, in a uniform that retained precision in spite of long and hard usage: gilt epaulets, spotlessly white neckcloth and three-cornered hat having a rosette and feather at its left side. He showed a clear eye, somewhat prominent and boldly set, a firm nose, firm lips, too, and a lean form, although he did have a slightly double chin. His face was heavily tanned; it was lighted from within by the perpetual fire of the spirit adventurous. He bore the unmistakable stamp of a man who would spare no man, himself least of all, a human being who would discipline every human being under him, throw every life of his command into the scales of chance, but who had no mercy on his own person and risked his own existence as carelessly for the cause as he risked that of any private soldier in the mixed ranks of the Pennsylvania Light Infantry.

"Howsomivver," he was saying in a voice just a little nasal and with an indefinable Yorkshire accent, "I want to goa it. You could see for yourself, even in your short ride through the camp, just how things are here. To goa it—General, I fair and plainly *must!*"

The boys' gaze was fixed, nevertheless, not so much on the host as on his visitor.

Washington sat very stiff and erect on a stool close by Wayne's, and he gave full effect to what such a position allowed his six-feet-three of height. Without being fat, he had a solid build. Sam immediately estimated his weight as being "close on to fifteen stone ten"—well above a couple of hundred pounds, anyhow—and marveled at the man's easy carriage.

"Don't shove so!" Gruger complained in his lowest key to his companion, for Bill's weight, pressed against him at that narrow hole was hard to stand.

The eavesdroppers' heads were almost on a level with the farmhouse floor and at that extremity of the room which was farthest from its two preoccupied occupants. A fortunate shadow, moreover, fell here and deepened as the sun climbed higher; so long as they didn't forget common caution, the boys felt sure they would be reasonably safe—only, common caution was not easy.

"Well," Bill whispered back, "g-g-give me *s-s-some* space, can't you?"

Grudgingly the other complied, but not to such an extent of generosity as might impair his own vision of what passed within:

"Will that do?"

"G-guess it'll have to."

"It's as much as *I* have."

"All wite—if you think so."

They looked again.

The Commander-in-Chief's powdered hair was brushed back at both top and temples from a brow no longer calm, as Gruger had always seen it pictured, but puckered and perplexed; the narrowed eyes indicated a troubled mind, and not many seconds were destined to elapse before the words that Washington spoke would confirm this indication. Yet the difference was somehow more than any effect of mental disturbance.

Nudging his fellow conspirator, Sam framed a comment and an inquiry without sound, for both lads had

learned lip-reading as a means of evading the orders against conversation in the ranks:

"He don't look *quite* the way I surely thought he would."

"No-no. I've s-seen him b-b-before, an' he don't l-look like he did then, neither."

Sam studied the unconscious hero.

"It's his mouth—that's what it is. *What's the matter with his mouth?*"

Something had indeed gone wrong with that, its owner's strongest feature. The lips curved slightly inward; they did not detract from dignity, but they gave him, at barely forty-seven years of age, the appearance of seventy.

Blunston's eyes lightened:

"C-course that's it! I know now." In a silence equaling Gruger's, Bill vouchsafed the explanation. "F-false teeth."

"False teeth? He don't look as if he'd got any sort, false *or* real!"

"He ain't."

"Aw, tell me what you *mean!*"

"Ain't you ever heard? He has three sets m-made out of solid walrus bone. You know who M-Major Paul Revere is? Well, he m-made 'em, before the war; and now, campaigning, they've all got broke, and he's repairing them—and the General's got to wait till the job's done."

Back to the hole went the boyish heads that had been a little way withdrawn for this gossip.

They were just in time: Washington was already dealing with that worry which he found heavier than

the trifling inconvenience of missing teeth. He spoke; the absence of Paul Revere's walrus bones had no effect on the somewhat formal manner of his speech, and what he said now seized precedence in the interest of the listening boys.

CHAPTER IV

A DESPERATE DECISION

The voice of the Commander-in-Chief rang clear:

". . . so I admit it is the sole salvation for Connecticut. Aye, and I do not conceal from you that the people at large are complaining—that the Congress is importunate and expects miracles—that the whole country is, in consequence, grave. Yet I am heartily convinced that an assault on Stony Point which failed would bear even worse fruit than your continued inactivity."

Sam's green eyes peered into Bill's china-blue ones, and Sam gulped.

But Wayne, too, plainly had to exert his utmost self-control. He was arguing in favor of a plan into which he had put his whole heart.

"There's a Yorkshire proverb, sur," said he doggedly, "that runs thus: 'When hope dees, fear's born' —and I think that's a true word."

A map lay on the desk. Washington lifted an enormous hand and firmly pointed to that linen-mounted paper.

"Prudence is not fear. We know that the Point's batteries can rake any column advancing upon the base of the hill. Those guns can support the enemy frigates on the river, in case of any attack by water. They can

assist Verplanck's, if you attempt assault upon the farther shore. These ascertained facts are serious enough to anchor my contention: they constitute a position practically impregnable."

"Not necessarily, sur." At reference to the map, Wayne's manner had changed. In him, at least, hope was not dead. He bent over the chart, his face glowing with excitement.

"Not necessarily?" demanded Washington.

Both Bill and Sam understood how bitterly, beneath his enforced military reserve, their leader must have been chafing against delay throughout all this trying rest at Sandy Beach. Then, above the map, Wayne's face lifted, triumphant.

"Dark's the time to nab it, sur. I'd start from here at noon—get to Spring Steel's by seven, if I didn't niffle on the way—only a mile and a half from the Point. I'd wait here, under cover. General, I'd make the climb at midnight!"

Did Washington also understand the force of that hot chagrin which had grown daily stronger because of the inactivity he had ordered? If he did understand it, it was not in his reserved nature to let it move him. His prudent patience had withstood public criticism and congressional censure; it seemed likely to withstand Wayne's impetuosity equally well.

He shook a resolute head:

"I have recounted the wholly known facts," he insisted. "Those facts of which we still remain in partial ignorance are probably just as formidable. Johnson"—the General referred to that British Lieutenant-Colonel who was in command of the fortifica-

tions on Stony Point—"Johnson is adding two new bastions to his works: a north bastion and a south. So you yourself reported."

"Yes, sur; but——"

"One of these, you have reason to believe, has already been completed; the other is unready——"

"Weaker, therefore, sur, and a better point to attack."

"Exactly; but *which* that one is—the north bastion or the south—you have not been able to ascertain, nor does it look likely that you can." The Commander-in-Chief spoke even more slowly now. "You might have some extremely slight opportunity for success did you possess this knowledge; but, since you do *not* possess it, why, to the host of other hazards against you is thus added the chance that, if you assault with your none too strong force, you may find you are attacking a new and perfected work of defense."

Bill groaned aloud. Sam shot a quick hand upward, to muffle the sound.

Was the Sandy Beach garrison to be refused its ambition once again?

The General's decision should have been conclusive, yet Wayne could not tamely accept it. He had seen in this visit from his chief a longed-for opening, and he would strain every effort—strain the very rules of military etiquette—to make the most of it. He had appealed, at first, by private letters, and won no success. Then he had openly sent that formal dispatch—and this visit resulted. Surely, a personal interview ought to bring about the desired result!

He could not bear to think otherwise. His own

passion for physical performance—the grumblings of his men—the ridicule of the civilian world: he had endured them all in silence. But here, when personal pleading met only official firmness, his sufferings goaded him to frenzy. He threw off the last rag of restraint:

"Consider me, sur——"

The blood mounted to his head. He stood up; his nasal voice broke. The peeping pair of boys could scarcely recognize in him the stern disciplinarian of other days—of only yesterday. For what, rightly or wrongly, he felt to be the rescue of his reputation, he begged as he would have scorned to beg for his mere life.

"Consider me, sur!" he repeated. "I entreat that of you—and that you will consider my poor men!"

"Us, too!" Sam whispered, and Bill nodded in a hearty agreement.

"You think the risk too great for us," Wayne was continuing; "but I—they—ask only to take it. Here we are, bravely advanced, then stopped short and allowed to do nothing. 'Tis terrible, is that. The enemy laugh at us, the Colonies, our own homefolk, are beginning to jeer." He raised his arms above his head. "Say that we lose our lives—what of that? Egad, sur, more than existence depends upon the making of an assault: my honor—my men's honor—these are at stake. And I find myself bound hand and foot by your orders! Well, I had rather so find myself held by real cords and then be tossed into yonder Hudson—a thousand times rather that than to stay for one more week in this shameful passivity!"

Throughout all the Army of the Continental Con-

gress there was no other officer who would so have dared to address Washington—no officer except this, whom, in turn, none of his own subordinates would have addressed in such terms. The boys, their unkempt heads shoved together a good six inches into the room through sheer dint of prodding, saw him lower his arms and fold them slowly across his breast.

So he stood at last. It was as if he were a prisoner awaiting sentence from his judge.

Against an outburst bordering on mutiny, Washington's whole nature protested. He flushed; he frowned. His long upper lip twitched; his eyes darkened.

"Sir!"

"General?"

But the Commander-in-Chief possessed in supreme degree that quality which Wayne had temporarily abandoned: he possessed self-control. He possessed, moreover, sympathy. These virtues he resolutely summoned to his aid.

"You forget yourself, sir," said he in tones resolutely kept level. "As your superior officer, I should not brook such violence—such rebellion—such——"

"General!"

"But as a man I must forgive it. You have had to suffer much here that is antipathetic to your temperament. Remember that I, in my place, have suffered, too—am at this moment suffering—from enforced inaction: that it is the lot of any of us who are in command of some portion of our new nation's raw troops. A soldier of your training and genius should realize, besides, that no passivity is shameful when it is in obedience to orders. Duty first, sir."

Wayne saluted. Outside, the arms of the lads went instinctively toward salute, but could not reach their half-buried heads.

"An assault?" Washington pursued, as he bowed acknowledgment to Wayne's gesture. "Why, sir, you have only for the moment to consult your own better judgment, disregarding me. In your present ignorance of Johnson's new fortifications, you surely would not venture to storm a position naturally so strong—not venture, save that you have fretted yourself out of common sense. To attempt your plan's execution would be madness, and not even *you*—in your right mind—would undertake it."

A last flicker of hope entered the Pennsylvanian's eyes. His head went up, his shoulders straightened; he thrust out his chin.

"Call me mad if I succeed, sur—sane if I fail. Daftness wins wars, and the Yorks proverb says 'good luck gi'es to some mair than they owt t'have, but nivver mair than they want.' Surely you know me, General: at your orders, I'd storm the gates of Hell—and I'll sure storm Stony Point, so be if you'll only let me try."

Visibly, Washington was touched. Visibly, the remnants of his recent wrath left him. Nevertheless, he was firm. In his turn, he too rose. There, in that bare room, in the blaze of July sunlight pouring through a glassless east window over mattress, desk and stools, he upon whose single form rested a weight of destiny such as has seldom been imposed on any man, faced his no less courageous subordinate. The eyes of the ill-concealed boys nearly popped out of their heads.

"Anthony Wayne," said Washington, "I avowed

your sterling ability when I put you in command of the Pennsylvania line; your bravery is everywhere known—but rashness is neither ability nor bravery. You think of your men and yourself; I have to think of all the army and the Colonies: to them, failure at Stony Point would be fatal. I formally forbid an assault unless you obtain the lacking information regarding those new bastions."

The two men stood at gaze. Wayne's face was now hidden from the pair of eavesdroppers; but again he began:

"General——"

"Not one word more." Washington raised a big, protesting hand. "I came here to inspect your command. I am now ready to preside at the review. Are your men ready as well?"

In sharp contrast to his former slow manner, he made a quick step toward the door. Wayne cast a despairing glance around the room, as if he might find there some forgotten argument. In joint fear that this glance might discover them, the boys jerked back their heads.

Once more, they were completely in the open air; the log wall of the hut rose between them and the men whom they had been spying. Nobody was near; nobody, indeed, was in sight here at the back of the compound—the encampment was, from this point, shut from view. The sun blazed pitilessly; the bees buzzed; the pine-cloaked hills rose shimmering on one hand, on the other flowed, cool and blue and inviting, the placid Hudson. An eternal peace seemed to brood over the whole of inanimate nature.

Sam seized his friend's shoulders.

"Bill," said he, "Washington's right, and of course I respect him more than anybody else in the world. But don't you see that Wayne's right, too? We've *got* to attack."

"Wish we c-could," said Blunston gloomily, "wish Washington'd l-l-let us. Sam, I g-got some of that meat left, and if y-you want a little snack of it, j-just to e-ease your d-d-disappointment——"

Gruger shook him:

"Hold your jaw! I learned woodcraft along the Susquehanna, and I'll wager I know more about it than these rapscallion scouts and spies of ours who have been ferreting around here for us. I'll wager they were just too afraid to risk their hides, those who came back. Well, *I'm* not too afraid—and I'd do anything for Wayne. Will you come along?"

"A-along?" Sam's jaw dropped. "Come along w-with you where?"

"I'm going to find out about those new bastions to-night," said Sam. "I'm going to run our sentries and climb Stony Point."

CHAPTER V

CATASTROPHE

Bill looked as if he were gazing at a particularly horrific ghost:

"You w-wouldn't ever d-d-dare try such a thing!"

"Yes, I would, too." Sam stood his ground. "What's more, I'm going to try it—and succeed. How about *you?*"

"M-me?"

"Will you come along?"

"Sam!"

"Are you afraid?"

Blunston was indeed afraid. Of course, he would always end by going anywhere Gruger led; but such a scheme as this——

"Oh, I g-go! Only, we c-can't e-ever—— How can we ever——"

The discussion was short-lived. More bugle-notes slew it, followed by another rattle of company-drums from across the compound.

Invisible lariats might have fallen over the excited lads, jerking them in opposite directions: thus suddenly came their separation. For here was something that brooked no delay. This staccato clatter, this brazen fanfare cleaving the summer morning formed

the call to quarters for the all-too-brief interval that would precede Washington's review.

Over the big square, now filled by jostling men bent on similar errands, Sam darted to prepare himself for the approaching event. He had two great passions: his admiration for Wayne, almost amounting to worship, and his resolve to make his way in the army. That admiration he would prove to-night by an endeavor to save his commanding officer's reputation; just now, he must serve his resolve by performance of humdrum duty.

"Stir your stumps, Redtop!"

The cry greeted him from a rude trough constructed behind the tents of the headquarters company, where his companions-in-arms were making grudging toilets. That order read this morning had increased their dislike for a process which has never been popular among enlisted men. These at Sandy Beach were not, they themselves protested, dandies; they said they were fighting folk—and they wanted to fight.

Sam plunged his freckled face into the more than doubtful water. He scrubbed hard, with the red palms of his warty hands. He snatched at a neighbor's well-nigh toothless comb.

"We're prime sorry we've no scents or essences for you," laughed some one.

"Careful," cautioned some one else in the same bantering tone, but addressing the first speaker: "We mustn't drive our Beau Fop into a fit of the fashionable vapors."

Sam looked for Eben Jones, who was generally the person to lead such a chorus of ridicule; but that pock-

marked soldier was not distinguishable in the splashing, hair-powdering mob. Gruger set his jaw to silence and went on about his work.

These fellows would sing another sort of song for him, if he succeeded to-night—and why shouldn't he succeed? His woodcraft was at least as good as that of those scouts who had too easily failed. He thought it better than theirs. Besides, tall for his age and, after all, a lad and as such less likely to excite suspicion, Sam might easily gain some point of observation which a grown man would only sacrifice his life in attaining.

Moreover, Gruger, as he had hinted to Bill, had long suspected that those other reconnoiterers prized their skins too highly to take the final risks necessary for procuring the information Wayne so anxiously required. A dozen times, the lad had wanted to volunteer his services, but thought he would be refused exactly because of that youthfulness which ought to prove his best asset in such an adventure. Well, the sight of Wayne's despair had at last proved too much for him, and a quick resolution resulted: to attempt by stealth what he might otherwise be forbidden to try. Now——

He began, unconsciously, to hum a song that Philip Freneau, the American sailor-poet, had lately made popular in Philadelphia:

"In her suit of green arrayed,
Hear her singing in the shade:
'Katy-did——
'Katy-did——
Katy-did!'"

Immediately the jeers began again:

"Encore!"

"Bravo!"

"He's a very pottleson for melody."

"Yo, but mark you how hard he's working to make himself pretty."

"That's so Washington will notice him and promote him to a captaincy in one bound."

Sam's cheeks burned, but he tried to pay no attention. He had already pipe-clayed the belt that crossed his chest. He began to brush his blouse.

" 'Tother side—turn about!"

"You've missed a speck there!"

"Don't overlook that smudge on your shoulder, little lad!"

He was late—too late to indulge in retaliation or futile anger. He kept to his tasks.

Once again the bugles sounded. They announced that the whole garrison of Sandy Beach must immediately form on the parade ground for its march in review before the Commander-in-Chief. The men's derision ceased abruptly; they scattered to snatch up their rifles—and Sam had not yet greased his hair, according to regulations, let alone powdered it.

The hair oil, drippings from ration-fat saved at the company kitchen, stood about in tin pannikins. Gruger reached for one of these and raised it carefully. At that very moment, somebody rushed by him, somebody cross-eyed, pock-marked. Jones it was—and he deliberately bumped Sam's raised arm so that the oil spilled from the pannikin in a tiny torrent and spilled over the

whole right side of the boy's lately spick and span jacket.

That part of his uniform was a ruin; the consequences of such a catastrophe when it was noted on the parade or during inspection, as it surely must be, passed imagination. Gruger's long-continued rage broke leash.

"You—you—you——"

But Eben Jones had gone. There was not even anybody to have seen the incident, except the two actors in it—and Bill Blunston, who happened to come dashing by on some mission from headquarters and who was in too much of a hurry to stop.

Sam shook his fist in the direction that Eben had taken. Bill only flung one speech over his heaving shoulder:

"W-wait till review's p-past; then I'll help you l-l-lick the b-big b-b-booby. I don't b-believe a man like that ever murdered anybody; he's a b-bully b-b-brag—that's all he is!"

Neither time nor chance for reprisals at present, anyhow. Worse than that: no time for repairs, and no fresh coat, in this poor camp, to change to. Trembling for the certain effects of his condition, Sam ran to his tent—seized—hooked on—tightened—his drum and, dashing out to the parade ground, flung himself into place with his company just as it assumed its final formation.

From across the compound there sounded the more distant orders, given with all the unction of the drill regulations of that period. The colonels repeated them, somewhat closer by. Closer still, the majors

echoed the colonels. Now the captains, standing ten paces ahead of their companies, took up the booming cry.

Everybody was nervous. Everybody was pretending to have no nerves at all. But spruce Richard Butler, Sam's commander, was too fluttered to note Gruger's calamitous state.

"Forward——"

Sam was in a perfect spasm of apprehension. Wayne had indeed shown some fondness for his drummer, but he was proud of his troops' discipline and would tolerate in none of them, on parade or on other duty, any laxness which failed to justify that pride. Disgruntled guards might wink at an occasional evasion of orders; not so their chief. He was a soldier by blood, inclination, and training; his Yorkshire grandfather, as all the camp knew, had been a dragoon-captain under King William III; coming to America, the son fought in the Indian wars, and it was common legend how Anthony himself neglected primary school in order to drill his playmates as full-fledged infantrymen.

Perhaps that was why he still spelled the word "infintrey"! Anyhow, this daring genius, for all his qualities praiseworthy or likeable, was a martinet. His attention to detail—so much ahead of his contemporaries in arms—was to become the cornerstone for the similar attention characteristic of our regular army in all later years; but, in exactly the measure in which Bill and Sam loved and admired him, they feared the anger he would certainly show at any infringement of discipline.

"*—march!*"

Well, Gruger was in for it now. He had no choice but to go ahead, regardless of his soiled condition—and yet he virtually led the column.

Automatically, his fingers tightened ever so little over the drumsticks, and began their task. The drum itself swayed at his left hip, responding to his beats with a stirring quickstep. Some twenty paces behind, the rank and file were swinging into what modern drill books call "company front." The color guard preceded them; before it marched a man of middle age, bearing the flag, and there, a yard or two in advance, strode Sam—a gray-haired veteran playing the fife on his right—the oil stain spread so wide over his once cherished uniform as to be quite hopelessly beyond concealment.

His wildly apprehensive green eyes could see Washington and Wayne standing, down the field, at the head of the staff. He even made out rotund Bill, a little to the rear of them, covertly wigwagging with attenuated motions:

"Come on!—Don't worry!"

Come on—Gruger *had* to!

Don't worry?—How could anybody in his present plight help worrying?

Wayne never missed the smallest trifle at inspection or on review. What would his face look like when he detected the condition of one of the very first figures in this march past? Still worse: what would he say and do, a few minutes later?

The distance lessened. No similar distance had ever seemed so brief.

Already, the quaking drummer boy was near enough to pick out the buff revers on the blue coat of the Commander-in-Chief, to note his firm mouth. Wayne, too, stood very straight, very stern with an even increased sternness, the result, doubtless, of his recent disappointment: erect, precise, he resembled some watchful hawk poised to pounce. And Bill was grinning; perhaps he meant his grin for an encouragement: it had, however, exactly the opposite effect.

Sam felt a cold sweat spring out between his shoulder blades and trickle in a chilly river down his back. His hands shook; he almost lost a drum beat.

Nearer——

Nearer——

There!

He was directly opposite those awesome figures now —opposite and far too close for any comfort. Their gloved hands went upward to salute.

"Eyes—*right!*"

The command boomed along the marching line.

Gruger would rather have looked in any other direction, but he had to look in that one. His faltering glance caught Wayne's grim gaze—and then Sam saw that his worst fears were realized: Wayne had immediately detected those shameful blotches.

No, not yet the worst! The worst came a second later. If anything were needed to add to the boy's confusion, it was added now. The morning was still bright, but heavy with the threat of thunder showers. It had been breezeless; at this instant of crisis, an impish squall of wind frisked out of the river and blew across the compound.

It set the dust whirling; it slapped Sam's freckled cheeks, and it blew off his cocked hat as cleanly as Eben Jones had knocked away that piece of headgear a while since. In the full blaze of the July sun, there rose revealed to the officers' sight Gruger's shock of red hair innocent of the prescribed grease and the ordered powder.

How he got through the remainder of his duties, the lad never knew.

CHAPTER VI

"TWENTY LASHES"

"Drummer!"

"Yes, sir."

"You are to report to headquarters immediately. Get along with you."

The review was over. Butler, who had conveyed this message in the voice of a policeman making an arrest, turned to other business. Sam saluted and walked away: he walked to the log-house, his knees growing weaker under him at every stride.

Wayne stood at the door. Washington had already started back toward New York, but Wayne's staff was here, even if Bill Blunston proved to be oddly absent, and Wayne's large eyes, blazing out of tanned cheeks, were in themselves a devastating flame that scorched the young offender.

Sam stopped at the greatest distance compatible with military etiquette. He clicked his heels and raised his open palm to that recovered hat. He was so sick at heart that the freckles shone almost black upon a face gone chalky white. Nevertheless, he kept himself, as far as he could, in hard control.

Wayne returned the salute:

"Come here."

Gruger perforce advanced, but no advance could have been more reluctant.

"Halt!"

Sam stopped short. He had removed his drum as soon as the review had ended. Now, hands at the seams of his knickerbockers, he came to attention.

Wayne raked him with another of those scorching glances:

"What's gone wrong with you?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Your hair is unpowdered."

"Yes, sir."

"And unoiled."

"Yes, sir. The oil's on my clothes."

The words slipped forth without rhyme or reason. They were the crazy utterance of sheer fright.

One of the staff officers guffawed. He should have known better. His commander spun around and shouted at him:

"To your quarters, Captain Roberts! Yabblins you've left your manners there. Search for them until I send after you."

The officer went. A hush fell over his companions. They drew back, realizing at last what a temper Wayne was in.

Then Wayne himself wheeled to the drummer boy again:

"Drummer, *you've* shamed me on the very review ground—in review before the Commander-in-Chief. Have you any excuse to offer?"

Sam looked vainly for Blunston: not that there could be hope in him, or anywhere; but a sight of his commonplace round face might have offered at least a balm to sorrow.

"Has all this camp gone daft?" Wayne demanded. "Are you struck dumb, drummer? When you are spoken to, reply!"

Well, Gruger would not tell the facts, wouldn't prove himself a tale-bearer, whatever his silence might seem to prove him. If somebody else had been in his trouble, he could have offered the truth, and perhaps freed him; but Sam was not the sort to bandy accusations in order to save his own person from punishment. Eben Jones had wronged him: he—Sam—and none other, must deal with Eben Jones.

"No, sir. I have no excuse."

Wayne looked at him closely, as if he suspected that here was some evasion. Bending a trifle forward, he said abruptly:

"This offense is not like you."

Gruger lifted his read head, gulping something down in his throat. His eyes showed their gratitude; his lips, however, remained firmly closed.

"Come, lad—come now! D'you not know the proverb? ' 'Tis a poor hedge that hezn't a bit of shelter.' So speak you up."

Still Gruger held his tongue.

Wayne had done what he could to conquer his temper. At this continued silence, his anger mounted once more, and it seemed to have gained strength during its brief captivity:

"Very well, then! This is another breach of discipline—this conduct of yours toward me. If you've no excuse, you *may* get the lash; but if you have an excuse and won't give it me when I order you to—ah ban, you'll *sartinly* get the flogging!"

Gruger bit his under lip. To his heart, his brain was saying:

"If I succeed at Stony Point to-night, I'll be forgiven. It will be after I've tasted the lash"—his flesh shrank at the thought of that punishment—"but I'll be forgiven."

Yet aloud he said nothing. He merely stood there immobile, his warty hands pressed tight against his trouser seams.

"You understand me?"

This at least could be answered. "Yes, sir; I understand, sir."

"So you choose that course?"

The assent came through stiff lips, but it came unhesitatingly:

"Yes, sir."

"Lieutenant Patterson!"

The officer addressed came forward, though with a plain distaste for the job of taking Sam into custody. He laid a hand on the boy's shoulder.

And then Bill Blunston intervened!

He rounded the log-house corner just as Patterson's fingers closed on Sam's jacket. Bill's fat torso was heaving, and he had an arm through an arm of cross-eyed Eben Jones.

Wayne and his staff, Patterson and his captive made a startled tableau.

"What's this?" Wayne shouted.

"H-here he is, sir." Bill managed a most unmilitary salute. "He w-wouldn't have come, o-only I t-t-told him you w-wanted him, sir."

Nearly everybody gaped. Wayne alone, whose rage

now painted him purple, found words for the questions that were in the brains of all:

"Wanted him? This man? Who is he? What do you mean?"

"He's Private Eben Jones, sir."

"I say, what do you *mean?* I say I don't want this fellow!"

Jones tried to turn away, but Bill held his arm in a steady grip.

"I know you don't want him, sir; b-but he w-wouldn't have c-c-come if I hadn't t-told him you did. It's all wite, sir. You *will* want him—in a m-minute. I went for him when you o-ordered Sam here. Jones knocked that oi-oil over Sam. I saw him—and I saw he did it on p-p-purpose."

Thus made thoroughly aware of the trap he had already begun to suspect had been laid for him, Jones foolishly attempted to free himself from his detention by open force. With his free hand, he sent a blow to Blunston's face. Bill ducked, but held fast.

And Eben's act was confession. At a quick order from Wayne, protesting Jones was put into the keeping of full-grown men, while the boy that had brought him here was left free to tell, undisturbed, the whole story of the case.

He told it, too. Bill was neither plaintiff nor defendant, so that no such scruples bound him as had tied Gruger. Within two minutes, the truth was out, despite all of Sam's now red-faced, but continued, silence—despite, also, the vehement interruptions and denials of Jones.

He was allowed to make a statement, but it was

made with such a hang-dog look that it bore on its surface the trade-mark of falsehood. Wayne scarcely listened to the latter part of it, and he generously avoided questioning Sam.

"Forty lashes!" Thus, and without comment, the commander delivered sentence upon Jones.

The latter howled in previsioned pain. It would indeed be a formidable punishment.

"Take him away," said Wayne.

Only then did Gruger speak:

"If you please, sir, I have no such grudge against him as'd call for all that. Forty lashes! If you'll just let him off altogether——"

"Silence. There's no question of a grudge—and no question of you—in this. 'Tis me the fellow's offended against, 'tis my orders he's broken, but 'tis entirely a question of discipline, not of any individual. As for you, my lad, you're guilty of disobedience in not answering my inquiries when I put them to you. Let the prisoner alone; you are lucky to have obtained your own pardon."

So Sam was forgiven far sooner than he had expected! He saluted:

"Thank you, sir."

But he regretted the extent of that sentence imposed on Jones, and he observed with some satisfaction that there was a debate of sorts going on in those wild eyes of Wayne. Would it be won by an unacknowledged and unacknowledgeable admiration for Gruger's course?

"Lieutenant Patterson," Wayne asked, "you understand the sentence?"

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"Yes, sir."

"Twenty lashes."

"I thought, sir——"

"Twenty lashes, I said. See that they are given—and at once."

The group of officers parted to let Patterson and Jones pass. Bill laid hold of Sam.

"L-let's go before there's m-more trouble. I know where—I mean, the cook's given me a snack of s-smoked beef, and——"

Neither boy heeded the ugly look that Eben Jones gave them as he was led away to punishment.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT THE LIGHTNING REVEALED

That night, true to Sam's determination, the two boys began their desperate adventure.

The day had dragged itself to a close without any unusual incident, except those consequent upon increased unrest. Inactive camps breed rumors, and Washington had scarcely departed before Sandy Beach thrilled with a report to the effect that the Commander-in-Chief had at last given permission for the desired assault. Why else, it was asked, had he come here and reviewed the troops at all? Soon, however, the truth leaked out—the generally taciturn Wayne must have been so chagrined as to drop a word to somebody—and then the reaction of disappointment and discontent became worse than anything that had gone before.

The sullenness of the officers increased and made them more angry with the men; the men would not silence their complaints. The rein of discipline was drawn tighter; it was proportionately resisted. There were several arrests for minor insubordination; there was an increase of fist battles among private soldiers whose tempers were worn thin and sore.

But otherwise nothing occurred. The dull routine went on in unbroken monotony. Eben Jones, once led

away to punishment, remained unseen. Sam and Bill, in common with all their comrades, performed their accustomed tasks; but, unlike their fellows, this pair at least looked forward to the dusk with lively emotion and a certain amount of fear.

So evening came at last—and, as it came, the lads went.

They had small trouble in running the guard, more careless now than ever. They left the cantonment by the rear, close to the spot where they had met and talked before dawn, hiding first in the farmhouse's shadow and then, on all fours, crossing a sentry's line of march when the sentry had passed by. As soon as they were out of bounds and out of sight, they spurted for the western hills, thence made a circuit of the camp and so finally came back to the river and the phantom road that ran northward, parallel to it.

The way was long; it was trying, but not, at first, hazardous, for it proved to be deserted. Timid at first, the lads felt their courage mount as they went forward and encountered no dangers. They had the strength of youth and the speed of excitement: late indeed, yet not too late, their journey neared its destination, and they began to mount the slopes of Stony Point.

Everywhere the night was dark. Out here on this hillside, it was pitch black.

Throughout the afternoon of panting heat, thunder clouds had lowered, low, but unbroken, over the river from Cranston's to Nyack. Then as the boys continued their long tramp along the Hudson, the dis-

couraged moon set early, and there were no stars.

Near Verplanck's, across King's Ferry, a light twinkled at what the Colonials had called Fort Fayette before losing it to their enemies. Above the dividing thousand yards of water, three lamps showed from English frigates' mastheads. Yet around those boys on Stony Point earth and sky were like Hamlet's cloak. Not even that summit to which they had crawled so close disclosed by a single glimmer the outlines of the royalist stronghold atop of it.

Bill wiped the sweat from his forehead: he could not see the hand he raised. He was ordinarily no coward; nevertheless, he could not, in this situation, keep up the high mood in which he had left Sandy Beach. He whispered:

"It's a-awful late, Sam."

"Not very," said Gruger, although he himself was beginning to undergo a slight change now that they were arrived at what must be a perilous position.

"We c-can't see where to go."

"All we gotta do's go up—on up."

Far off, something rumbled—far off and well overhead.

"W-what—*what's* that?"

"Only thunder."

" 'Tisn't, neither. Let's retreat. We c-can't ever get near enough to f-find out anything, not b-before it's light we can't. And it's a l-l-long way back to c-camp."

His companion thought so, too. Still, Gruger refused to confess it.

"When we've come this—far," he panted, for the

climb was severe, "it's a shame—a shame upon us not to try a—little farther."

The rumblings intensified with every step. They were now clearly the roll of thunder—Bill had to admit it. A storm was advancing from the direction of Donderberg Mountain. But, although he now knew the sound to be merely a natural phenomenon, Blunston shook with every repetition of it.

"That must be the tenth, and e-each time I c-can't help taking it for c-c-cannon."

"You ought—to know better."

"We'll get a drenching."

"We're soldiers."

"D-don't I know it? But that don't make me l-like water any better."

"What we've got to look out for isn't cannon. Muskets are what we've got to look out for: the muskets of any outpost."

"And n-not just that. If we stumbles on one of these Lobsters' pickets in this d-dark, we'll be killed," Bill protested; "and if we don't get to c-camp for sun-up roll call, why, Wayne'll have us flogged same's he flogged Jones."

They had thought much of both possibilities before deciding to try the rôle of unauthorized scouts; Sam, even, had all too lately come as close as he wished to the lash; but the part he chose had appeared easy to him when he first decided upon it. Now, however, they might be close to some outpost of those enemies in red whom the people of the Colonies derisively labeled "Lobsters": somehow or other, things looked different.

"Yes," Sam grimly granted, "and I don't know which is worse: bullet or whip." He had recovered his breath; he was working forward steadily enough. Even if upright, he should have been invisible, but he meant to take no chances and therefore bent low, his head on a level with his belt. "Only, if we are killed we can't get flogged—and that's some satisfaction, anyhow."

Bill followed, because, in spite of all this difference of opinion, in the end he always did follow Gruger, followed grumblingly, because he always liked to grumble on such occasions.

"You speak for yourself," he muttered. "For m-my part, I prefer the l-lash."

Upward they went, and still met no sign of living thing—still less of an enemy. The night was like a bandage to their eyes—yet they must be nearing the fort. Sam suggested that they take an added precaution: that they lie flat and continue their climb on their bellies. Bill flopped with such force that he emitted a half-cry.

"Hush!" Gruger cautioned over shoulder.

"Then l-let me take hold of your heel. I c-can't see you; and if I d-daren't make a sound, *you* c-can't hear *me:* we'll get separated, first thing we know. Come on: stick your heels back here."

Blunston groped for one of his friend's squirming boots. He found them and held fast.

As the electricity increased in the atmosphere, the heat intensified, and the air became more and more oppressive. Surcharged, it presently weighed against the boys' temples like a hat that is too tight for

its wearer. Grass and stubble stung the hands, while the pungent odor of the earth burnt the nostrils.

"All right," said Sam. "You've got me now: hold on to me. But, remember—no noise."

Onward they went, onward at a snail's pace. Onward they wriggled through the inky air, hot and heavy, over skin-tearing stones.

Rapidly, the thunder grew in violence and occurrence. It was at last a perfect peal, sounding every few minutes, and almost directly out of the zenith. At one clap, Bill started so badly as to lose hold of that guiding heel. He refound it with difficulty, after considerable groping, and at the price of an annoyed kick launched and received in the process of search. The concussion was distinctly audible between thunder claps.

"Th-thought you wanted no noise," Blunston growled as he dug toes, free fingers, and both elbows into the grudgingly yielding soil.

"I did—so *don't talk!*"

"You didn't g-get it, so I'm talking. A p-person couldn't hear a b-bugle out here, with this s-storm coming on."

A person certainly could not—not when it thundered, anyhow; and the thunder waxed yet more and more frequent. Perhaps just because Bill knew he could not be heard, he held his peace for quite a while after that retort; more likely, however, he was too busy weighing his chances of ever leaving Stony Point alive.

"Bang!"

Indeed, like artillery, the oncoming storm rolled its malignant echoes up and down among the river hills and across their intervening valleys.

"*Ber*-ANG!"

Bill groaned. He had been as eager as Sam to secure the data that would assure an assault—but he had not counted on the thunder.

All of a sudden, he realized something else: that he had made a grave mistake in not counting on the lightning——

"*Shrich!*"

The first flash ripped the air as if it were a Titan ripping some titanic garment; it jabbed the sky like a two-pronged fork of fire. For one instant it showed shadowy masses of rock, made vivid two white faces staring at each other. Then it was gone, rendering the succeeding darkness even more impenetrable than before.

"It str-struck j-j-just over there!"

Bill pointed, but Sam could of course not know that. Gruger said:

"What of it?"

"Once," Blunston replied, "I saw a d-dandy s-sorrel horse s-st-struck in m-my father's s-stable. It b-bored a hole clean through him.—Let's t-turn around and s-start back."

"No. We'll just keep on a little farther. We *must* be near those new works now, wherever they are." Nevertheless, that picture of the lightning-struck horse shone very vivid in Sam's mind. "Was the hole it made in him," Gruger asked, "burned around the edges?"

"Dunno."

"Why don't you know?"

"Forget. He was dead, though. Pa said the poor beast never knew what 'twas struck him."

"Well," Sam groaned, "come on."

So on they went. The stones cut them. The sweat poured into their eyes and down between their panting lips. But they kept pushing ahead, stomachs flat to the ground, until, finally, the storm broke.

It did not begin with a few drops of gentle warning. It started with a truly tremendous explosion and a white lightning flash that seemed to tear the bottom out of a celestial sea. The water poured downward almost simultaneously with the illumination, and with felling force: a veritable Niagara.

By that lurid, however momentary, illumination, Sam had caught a glimpse of a rock that stood up from the hillside some twenty yards ahead. It was not high, but its top extended over its sides, rather like cottage eaves.

"Come on!"

Thither he dragged Bill, both boys upright once more.

The pestiferous rain beat on their heads and drenched their bodies in a half-minute. The thunder snapped. The lightning darted, zigzag, on either side of them. Stones rolled under their feet as they rose and ran. They looked nowhere, they could see nowhere, except downward, until they reached that rock.

They got there as if after some struggle undersea.

It had been as if they were fighting submarine currents enforced by gigantic pressure from above.

Both lads leaned against the stony shelter with breasts heaving. Their uniforms were soaked. Their shoes, in the occasional silences, gave out sounds like defective ship pumps as their toes worked instinctively up and down in them.

And yet even this side of the rock proved to be no haven. A heavy wind had risen; it ascended Stony Point from the Hudson, as such winds often do at that time of year, and it drove the rain against the pair of refugees—for that is what the storm had made them—and against the wall behind them, whence it was straightway washed back.

Blunston spluttered:

"G-getting it from both ways here, w-we are, as sh-sure as eggs are eggs!"

Sam said:

"Come on around to the upper side."

He continued to lead, but not for far. The thunder renewed itself and drowned out all other noises: it inhibited action.

For quite thirty seconds, the ebon blackness blinded all sight. Then——

Sam ran into something——

Somebody!

Gruger sprang backward. In his leap, he completely overturned Bill.

"Wh-what in the name of a-all——"

That collision startled Blunston out of caution. He fairly shouted the beginning of his query.

But he did not finish it—ever. He did not have to. He could not have finished it had he wished.

Another blast of thunder shook the rock. Another lightning stroke made night a terrible day.

There, having himself fallen back at least two paces, stood, just before the lads, a heavy man with a broad, puffy face gone pasty white—with a pair of little eyes fuming nastily—with a British uniform on him—and with a musket leveled fatally against these intruders.

CHAPTER VIII

"WHO GOES THERE?"

Quick upon the first lightning flash followed a second. During their infinitely diminutive divisions of time and the less than a quarter-second elapsing between them, the drama was enacted.

"Who goes there?"

That shout came from the bolt of light. It merged with the rattle of thunder.

Sam spun around like a top. He collided sharply with Bill, and both boys fell. Together they tumbled into the deluge of rain, and the pitchy darkness enveloped them.

"Answer!"

The demand was bawled blindly into the night The lads scarcely heard it.

"Answer—or I fire!"

This time the words were audible enough, but they fetched no reply from the fugitives. The wind roared, the water hissed, there came a rattle of loosened stones that might indicate the flight's direction, yet vocal response was lacking. Neither Gruger nor Blunston could have answered had they wished: they were too violently tumbling downhill.

Then——

Did he fire, that lone sentry, who had evidently

stolen from his post to hunt partial shelter under the rock? Did he?

It was impossible to tell, for just then the skies fired a mightier volley than any muskets could contrive. It swallowed every lesser sound, the crackling lightning and the bellowing thunder exploding simultaneously and seeming to tear at the very heart of Stony Point.

Rolling over and over, yet always away, the boys thus had one more fleeting glimpse of their enemy. They saw his pasty face, his red uniform; they saw his weapon lowered toward the course they had involuntarily taken. But any concussion of mere powder's making, and flash of a merely human firearm, were swallowed, if they indeed occurred, by the concussion and flash of the storm.

"I c-can't stop!" gasped Bill as the noise finally subsided.

"Don't try to stop!" Gruger commanded. "Try to keep on rolling!"

Nevertheless, he was himself on his feet a moment later. He had heard—or thought he heard—pursuing steps. A fight would be futile; a spy is of use to his master only so long as undetected by the person spied upon. Sam scrambled to his long legs and ran, sightless, downward, Bill madly pounding close after him.

Then they did hear, through the tempest's rage, other cries from above. They heard unmistakable shots, the final sounding of an alarm. But these automatically increased the runaways' speed; they created a distance that soon dulled their own wild clamor.

"Run!" yelled Sam.

There was no need, however, for such advice.

Blunston bounded abreast of his friend. The couple fairly plunged. They vaulted rocks instead of circling them; they leaped, when the lightning warned them, over water-gushing gullies.

"Run!" Gruger repeated like a man in a delirium of fever.

"I *am* r-running!" blurted Bill.

Now it was he who crashed to the ground; now it was Sam. But after every fall they rose at once, and ever they lurched onward: the very force of the gale directed against them helped to diminished gravitation's pull.

Stony Point juts far out into the Hudson, which washes three-fourths of its forward base. The other quarter was covered by a marsh in those days, and where that joined the river ran a strip of land passable at low tide. The volunteer reconnoiterers had approached the heights from a flank, whereas their wholly uncalculated descent, being a more direct route, led them to this strip. They had studied the map and managed to recognize their whereabouts.

"Will we have to s-swim?" Bill asked.

"No," Sam reassured him: providentially, the tide was at ebb.

Pursuit, if ever fully started, had apparently been given up on the theory that the visitors were not worth the long chase involved by an attempted capture. They plainly did not herald an assault in force, and, if they were spies, they had been scared away before they had found out anything of value. Yet, notwithstanding this, and as if for a farewell taunt, a single rocket now redly crossed the zenith.

"Ouch!" cried Bill, and jumped. "What's that, anyhow?"

"It's a signal."

"What for?"

Sam's explanation was cut short. A cannon was fired from the fort at a venture: its solid shot sent up a shower of wet sand none too far behind the escaping adventurers. Stony Point's batteries protected this approach; they could assist those frigates in midstream and might even effectually help, in any fight, the British works at Verplanck's, on the Hudson's other shore.

"Hurry!" said Gruger.

"They c-can't see us, and I'm not p-p-pony-post!"

"But those ships heard that gun and saw that rocket. They might send a boat crew ashore."

Moving lights did indicate some activity on the river. Badly blown, the boys strained to renew their run and held it until they changed to a dog trot when well along the highway. Here began, properly, the return to camp, and this journey, even when the storm quite ceased, seemed three times as long as the trip out had been.

"I shan't soon forget that sentry's face," laughed Sam. "He looked like a plate of porridge."

"I c-calculate he'll r-remember yours," Blunston stammered: "you r-r-resembled a cut of c-cold pork." But these compliments were dangerous, and neither lad was so light-hearted as he pretended to be. Bill added, with more sincerity: "I'm *r-rav'nous* hungry, I am."

They shivered. They were wet through and through, and the ante-morning chill saturated the air.

Its icy contact had ended all jubilation over their escape, and it brought home to Gruger the realization of his essential failure.

He had found out nothing at all about those new bastions; he had not so much as seen the British works. He was no better than those other emissaries whose skill he had flouted, of whose courage he had stood in doubt. Having gone to Stony Point with a vaunting vow to save Wayne's reputation, here he was scurrying back toward Sandy Beach as a whipped cur runs for home.

He was too depressed to discuss his depression, and Bill was for long too damp and cold and hungry to take note of this silence or to guess its cause. A pair of sorry figures, they traveled the first few miles mutely.

CHAPTER IX

THE TOWER ARSENAL'S TOKEN

Haste, however, seemed at first necessary. They could easily pass the camp's sentries, but tardiness at their tasks would surely mean detection by the officers, and it would be the worst excuse imaginable to plead that they had risked capture by the enemy in an unauthorized and frustrated endeavor, the sole virtue of which could lie nowhere except in success.

Even Bill began to appreciate something of all this:

"We m-mustn't be late for roll call."

"No, siree!"

"We m-may get that fl-flogging yet."

"If Wayne gives guardhouse for being away from Sunday church, I don't know what he'd give for a roll-call absence."

"C-course you don't—'cause nobody's ever d-dared *be* absent."

Bit by bit, the skies grew gray. The trees bordering the road rose gauntly to right and left. For the first time in hours, the truants could look at each other closely and with some degree of leisure.

Bill manfully maintained his grin, but his soaked clothes stuck to his rotund body, and his eyes were glassy. Every angle of Sam's lank frame showed

through his clinging garments; his face was white and drawn. Both lads' uniforms had been torn by the stones of the hillside; its mud spotted them from head to foot.

"And n-nothing to change to!" Blunston gloomily mourned..

"We've got to get back before reveille," Gruger declared, "so's to have a little while for cleaning up."

"I h-had a s-sausage in my pocket," Bill lamented, "but it's gone now. It must have d-d-dropped out when we rolled downhill."

Painfully, they increased their pace. Their legs ached, all their bones ached. Sam's despair deepened; Bill's hunger grew greater.

About a mile from Sandy Beach, at a spot where the highway left the Hudson for perhaps a mile, they struck into a short cut that followed the river and was known to them because they had often traveled it to their favorite fishing hole. It was not a road otherwise much frequented, winding between tall hemlocks and a dense underbrush of rhododendron and whortleberry. Now the rain had filled it with mud that turned every third step into a slide; but it did gain the lads a large portion of precious time, and their progress was made easier by the gradual coming of daylight.

Suddenly, Bill could no longer resist the pleadings of his stomach. His memory stirred, and his pet vice assailed and conquered him. He pointed westward, into the thicket.

"R-remember that sp-spring-house a little way b-back in there?"

Sam nodded.

"B-belongs to a f-farm farther b-back."

Gruger was suspicious now, but he resolutely said nothing.

" 'Tisn't ever locked," Bill continued.

"Hum."

"And there's a-always things to eat inside—lots of things."

"Well?"

"S-Sam, l-l-let's——"

That was enough. "We will not!" Gruger averred. "We'll go right on ahead."

"Aw, we c-can leave a f-few p-p-pennies to pay for anything we t-take!"

"There isn't time!"

"Y-yes, there is. We've gained a heap by ch-choosing this sh-sh-short-cut. Come on!"

He knew he would lose, did Bill, if he waited to argue. He didn't wait: he darted into the underbrush.

"I won't go!" Sam angrily vociferated after that disappearing figure.

"Then b-be sure to w-wait just where you are! I w-won't be l-long!"

Blunston's voice came back through a curtain of brushwood. Gruger scorned to answer: he was accustomed to obedience from Bill when the latter was not in one of his teasing fits, but Sam knew well enough that there was no coping with his friend's love for food. Besides, though he had not agreed to the statement, there was now really less need of hurry, and he wouldn't think of returning to camp alone. He sat down in the mud and leaned against a hemlock trunk.

The forest was strangely still. Just here the road

turned an abrupt corner, losing itself to view from both north and south. Sam might have been on a desert island.

"I 'most wish I was," he bitterly reflected, "I've made such a failure of everything."

Through his brooding young brain ran the sadder part of Philip Freneau's song:

> "Did you only mean to say,
> 'I have had my summer day
> And am passing, soon, away
> To the grave of Katy-did'?"

Suppose he'd been killed, up there on Stony Point? Suppose——

Strangely still, this forest? No, for now there came a sound.

That wasn't Bill returning; it didn't come from the direction in which Bill had gone. This sound came from the south. It came from the road, and it came closer and closer.

Sam jumped up. The thing was clear now beyond any manner of doubt: somewhere behind the southern curve of that short cut, a horse was approaching at a smart trot.

The boy's first impulse was to take to the bushes. He could see nothing, of course—that curve hid all—but he would soon see and be seen, if he remained here. Suppose this was an officer, or some messenger from Sandy Beach, perhaps a properly accredited scout, covering the approach to his reconnaissance on horseback? Sam was out of bounds, and had the best of reasons for hiding.

He had just bent double to penetrate the underbrush, his hands were already parting the reeds before him, when a mighty crash momentarily arrested further movement. It was the crash of a heavy fall, and with it the hoof beats stopped peremptorily.

"Who goes there?"

That cry broke from him instinctively, in the formula of the soldier he was studying to be, perhaps as the unconscious echo of the challenge he had so recently received on Stony Point, and, like the Britisher's challenge, it passed unanswered. Some rider and his mount must certainly have come to grief in the slippery mud of the short cut.

Well, if there was trouble of this sort, Gruger must give help, even at the risk of being discovered absent from camp without leave. He unhesitatingly floundered around the turning.

A saddled horse lay there, foam-flecked and mud-bespattered. As Sam drew near, it turned upon him a muzzle in which the red nostrils fluttered with broken breaths, the eyes protruding half in fright and half in appeal.

"Who-a!"

The beast tried to get up, but its off foreleg appeared to be broken. Moved by the resignation which its kind always shows when wounded, the animal slid back quietly into the mire, its flanks heaving spasmodically.

Gruger had not been brought up along the Susquehanna of those days without learning to love horses and how to manage them. He spoke soothingly, stroked the mane, crooned a little in the quivering

ears, and then made a rapid examination of the injuries.

Yes, the leg *was* broken—just below the knee. The case was hopeless; the boy could see that at a glance. There had been a terrible tumble, one quite severe enough to kill any rider who was thrown by——

Where was this animal's rider?

Sam looked around: the road was empty. Trees and brush on either hand; the ribbon of sky above; the mud below, and this wounded creature in the midst of it: there was nothing else visible.

Gruger dismissed the idea that the horse might be a runaway: the pace had been too steady for that, the hoof beats too heavy. Yet, if the rider was badly hurt, he would not be missing, whereas, if he had "fallen soft," as horsemen say, he surely ought to be equally in view, ministering to this wounded beast.

What did it all mean?

Wartime is a time of strange devices; in this Hudson countryside just then there were many who preferred to avoid undue attention, like Sam himself. He remembered his shouted challenge: it had been of a sort sufficient to alarm any traveler with secrets to hide.

Gruger was about to look for boot tracks in the mud, when his attention was caught and held by other proofs that somebody, anyhow, had lately quit this spot in a hurry: things had fallen and been left behind. In the waxing light, two such articles arrested Sam's glance; they were a wallet, apparently stuffed with papers, and, close by, a pistol of what seemed military make.

"Is it one of our men?"

The boy scarcely breathed the question. He was kneeling beside the horse, his back to the bushes separating the road from the river. The fingers of his one hand closed involuntarily upon the wallet; those of the other hand now darted toward the weapon, but they stopped in mid-course.

"Phew!"

The half-light had revealed, on the pistol's butt, a design which, seen in these circumstances, well-nigh paralyzed further physical action.

It was as much an advertisement of the article's origin as any design on a silver spoon or piece of fine pottery at home. It was a sort of trade-mark, yet a mark that every Colonial soldier knew almost as well as did every man in the British army. A crown, it was, a crown topped by a Maltese cross, the Georgian crown—the symbol of the Tower Arsenal: the Royal Arsenal of the Tower of London.

With a quick intake of breath, Sam regained muscular control of himself. Again he reached for the pistol. And again he failed to reach that uncanny weapon!

It disappeared. Something covered it. A man's booted foot crushed down upon it.

The boot had shot forward from behind Gruger. From behind him, but also from above, a harsh voice spoke:

"Hand me my wallet—and hold your jaw! You've seen too much, youngster. For all your rebel uniform, you are not going back to Sandy Beach—you are going along with me to Stony Point."

CHAPTER X

THE ENEMY'S MESSENGER

Tight against that point where his neck ended and the rear of his skull began, Sam felt the pressure of something small and round and cold. It was a contact he had never experienced before, but he did not have to be told what it was, in order to recognize it. It was the business end of a second pistol.

He did not dare to turn. The patiently suffering horse, the wallet, a few square yards of wet roadway: these were all that, kneeling thus, he could see—these and this solid boot thrust forward, at one side, from behind him.

"Make haste, or I'll scatter your brains in the mud!" A powerful oath accompanied that threat launched above his red head.

Panic's grip had tightened on the boy's heart, but he made a mighty effort to keep his brain at its steady best. That was all he had left to fight with.

"If you fire," he said—and was pleased to note that his voice didn't break—"you will harm yourself as well as me: the noise will bring out our patrols from Sandy Beach."

"Then I'll strangle you instead." The unseen captor spoke in a tone the more awesome because it was so coolly calm; he seemed to be talking of an act common enough in his history. "I would do for you

anyhow, if I hadn't lost my way and didn't stand in need of a guide—or if Lieutenant-Colonel Johnson mightn't want a bit of information out of you, before he hangs you as a spy."

Sam's stomach heaved. "A spy? I'm in Colonial uniform, and I'm not inside the British lines." If he could only see this man! Not to see him made him doubly horrible. "And what are you but a spy, anyhow?"

The captor, however, was in no mood for any discussion of military etiquette. His sole answer was a reiteration of his demand and his threat:

"Belay your talk! Hand up that wallet to me, or you die here and now!"

Suddenly Gruger conceived a plan; it was desperate, yet it was also imperative. He extended an arm with the wallet, lowering his head the while. The pistol behind kept pace with him, but his mad idea was to swerve to one side, as if his knees had slipped in the mud, whereupon, thus freed for an instant from that deadly pressure, he might seize the extended boot and try to toss its owner backward.

Would he have succeeded? He was never to know, for another event intervened.

His descending gaze was necessarily turned flankward and a little to the rear. There, in this strictly curtailed field of vision, he saw—moving forward, but still well back of the first foot—another one.

And it was no mate to the dismounted rider's, either. This was a poor, water-soaked affair—a Continental army boot, if ever there was one. Blackened toes peeped through its gaping front.

It was curling softly now before the British boot. Very softly, but very quick.

Then the thing happened. The new foot hooked. It pulled. Arms flew out over Sam's red head. He threw himself prone and to one side—free from the pistol. Somebody cried out—an oath. A shot—a fall: these followed simultaneously.

Gruger bounded erect. Two forms were interlocked, thrashing the mud like fighting hippopotami on the banks of the Blue Nile. Sam jumped upon them, to the aid of the one who had so opportunely rescued him.

"It's a-a-all wite!"

A clay-plastered scarecrow sat on the chest of a supine and unconscious stranger and grinned reassurance: Bill Blunston.

"Bill!"

"H-heard you call 'W-who's there?'—t-turned b-back. C-came quiet 'cause I guessed there might be t-trouble. Then I saw he'd sneaked on to you. Well, t-two can play at that game—and I p-p-played it on him."

Sam's grimy hands wrung Blunston's:

"You just about saved my life."

"F-feel like a trundling-mop—and of c-course you c-called 'fore I reached that sp-spring-house, so's I d-didn't get the f-f-food."

They turned to their captive. His second pistol—the one he had not lost when his horse came down—had been knocked upward by Bill's embrace and sent its bullet through the prisoner's left shoulder: it was not a bad wound; they dressed it readily.

"The tripping you gave him was what stunned him, Bill."

The fellow was an evil-looking brute dressed in civilian clothes. He was about Gruger's build and height. He had spoken, Sam now thought, more like a Colonial than an Englishman; but, seen at last, his swarthy skin, flattened nose, and black hair of peculiar luster hinted at a yet more alien strain. Although he lay quite senseless, the lower lid of one eye hung open: some ancient hurt had left it permanently drooping so that its red lining was exposed.

"I must have given him a g-good deal," said Bill: "he looks like 'twould t-take a lot to s-s-stun him."

With his mount's bridle, they bound his right arm to his side. They painstakingly hobbled him so that he might walk only with difficulty.

"And now," said Sam, "let's see what's in this precious wallet."

But Bill was bending over the horse. There, he agreed with Gruger, was a wound that could not be cured.

"Let the w-wallet wait. We must p-put this poor brute out of his agony f-f-first."

They did it, with the handiest pistol. Soldiers though they thought they were, and only just escaped from dire bodily perils, they both shut their eyes when the shot was fired.

Its concussion brought their prisoner back to consciousness. He sat up. He cursed them roundly.

"I thought you said," he concluded, "that a shot would bring out your patrols. Where are they?"

"Oh, that," said Sam, "was just for you. We're

far enough from our camp. Tell us who you are and what you're doing here."

Another oath was the captive's sole reply. The Continental army was not composed entirely of soft-spoken men, but this ruffian appeared able to surpass anything it could boast. He could scarcely have been five years Sam's senior, but he gave evidence of a long training in the worst of schools.

"If you won't tell," Gruger retorted, "we'll find out for ourselves." He began to think that perhaps, after all, he had played truant from camp to some advantage! "No matter if we miss reveille *and* roll call, Bill: we've got more than an excuse as long as we've got this Lobster."

In what was now full dawn, and under their captive's impotent scowls, the boys emptied the wallet. Gloatingly they perused its contents.

They were reports, doubtless in themselves of no great importance, but British and from the Crown force on Staten Island, intended for Sir Henry Clinton, by way of Stony Point. Everybody in Wayne's camp knew that there had for some time existed a thoroughly organized service of hired civilian courtiers passing through the American lines, or around them. The present messenger was vouched for, to Lieutenant-Colonel Johnson, in credentials signed by the Staten Island commander and describing their bearer as fresh to the service: José Valdivia, now a resident of Castleton Corners, though a half-Carib native of Santo Domingo and formerly able seaman upon the British privateer *Much-Wenlock*.

"D-didn't know the route," Bill unnecessarily eluci-

dated. "Guess they generally make a w-wider circle. Horse f-fell—hid when you y'yelled, but went for you when he s-saw you were alone."

Sam scarcely took this in. His green eyes danced; his wart-sprinkled hands shook so that he nearly dropped the papers. Last night's terrors, this morning's fright, were no more to him than if they had been a dream: he had arrived at a great idea. Even then he knew it was wild—knew it was perilous. But possible it did seem, and the glamour of it blinded him to everything else.

"Bill," he said, "if this José Thingamajig's new to his work, the enemy at Stony Point won't know him by his looks." He turned to his prisoner. "*Do* they know you, José?"

The Carib only cursed again.

"Well, the credentials as good as say they don't. Bill, he likely has a bit of extra paper on him. Make copies of these dispatches: I'll need the originals. Yes, siree, he's near enough to my size! Come on and help me get his clothes off so's I can change with him."

Already Sam had flung aside his damp blouse of buff and blue.

Bill had been amazed when, yesterday, their secret expedition was proposed to him; but that amazement became a poor thing in comparison to the stupefaction to which he was here subjected.

"*Wh-what* are you going to d-d-do?"

He gaped, he gasped, he gurgled. Yet he guessed the answer—and the expected answer came:

"I'm going to finish this fellow's interrupted job. I'm going to carry these reports to Johnson on Stony

Point. And so I'm going to get the information that Wayne has to have!"

Yes, of course, that would be it: that would be exactly what Bill's harebrained friend would attempt. Hadn't he already shown the spirit for just such endeavor? This adventure went beyond all its predecessors, but it was perfectly in character with the adventurer. That head wasn't red for nothing. Yet succeed? Such a scheme succeed? Never!

Neither boy heeded a low ejaculation from their prisoner. Staring wide-eyed at Gruger, Blunston could merely stammer:

"L-l-loony!"

"No fear."

"D-don't you know that a spy——"

"It's not like it was a few hours ago. With these papers I can walk straight into the fort—and they'll thank me for coming."

The change of clothing, accomplished in spite of José Valdivia's protests and wrigglings, was almost complete. Sam was buckling the breeches.

"Sam, you *w-won't*——"

"Bill, he said—Wayne did—he'd reach Spring Steel's by seven, if he ever tried the assault—said he'd wait around till twelve before attacking, didn't he? Well, you tell him about me having these things to get inside with. Tell him I'll be lying low—you don't know where, so's he can't have me found and brought back—till about five. At five I'll start up the hill: night's the safest time for masquerading. Tell him to take the hazard of a march to Spring Steel's. That

can't do any harm: if I don't get the information for him, he can just fall back on Sandy Beach again."

The prisoner frowned.

"Wayne c-can fall back," Bill blurted; "but what a-about you? Th-that's what I'm thinking of!"

"Me?" There came tenderness into Sam's tone. "It's nice of you; but we've got better things to think about now." The tenderness fled. "We've got to think about Stony Point."

Blunston knew that look which illuminated the other's face; it was the look that always came there when Gruger had a scheme not to be denied by logic, threat, or plea. Nevertheless, protest struggled through Bill's lips:

"You——" Were those tears that blurred the china-blue eyes? "You'll n-never c-come h-home."

Sam laughed. He was too elated now to experience any perturbation. "I'm not going to try to."

"W-wh-*what?*"

"That. Aren't we used to talking without using words?"

"What d-do you mean *now?*"

Messengers, of course, stayed at least overnight inside those British fortifications before setting out to the risks of the return journey. While resting, they could see all there was to be seen. And there were rockets up there in constant use. Hadn't the boys seen one last night? And wouldn't Sam, once inside the fort, find some chance to fire one? He'd be caught, of course; but he wasn't supposed to be a soldier, only a former privateersman. Well, he'd pretend to be an awkward trifler: he'd plead that it was an accident—a

joke—anything. Oh, there'd be a way! He'd make one.

With mad enthusiasm, he sluiced all this folly at his staggering friend:

"Yes, I will. They won't be suspecting me: that's the whole point. I'll have the run of the fort. Well, then! Remember what Colonel Revere's friends did for him at Boston? I'm going to do that for Wayne. Only most likely with rockets. Haven't you noticed, all *they* fire, they fire as straight up as they can? You'll know mine for mine because 'twill be to one side or t'other. And if I can squirm out of it, why, our fellows'll be attacking before the enemy can court-martial me."

"Sam!"

"There you are: *Some time between our men's arrival at Spring Steel's and the stroke of midnight, I'll manage to throw a torch, or set off a rocket—and the side it shoots toward will be the weak bastion!*"

Not even from Sam had Bill ever heard a more crazy scheme. Blunston pointed out its dangers; Gruger, though hearing quietly, pooh-poohed them. The one boy argued that opportunities for signaling of any sort would almost certainly be nil; the other boy retorted that, in such case, Wayne need but retire and await, downriver, the false messenger's return after a night's rest within the fortress.

Bill became insinuating:

"Wh-whyn't you go to Sandy Beach with me and g-get Wayne's permission?"

"You know why. For the same reason I didn't try to get it before: because he wouldn't give it. But

when you've once told him that it's too late to stop me, that I'm on my way——"

"He'll skin my hide!"

"Let him." Sam's absorption was too great to worry over the possible wounds of even his best friend. "Why do you care—for once? Only he likely won't do it: not when you're bringing him in a prisoner. Now, copy these dispatches; and here, take one pistol, and I'll take t'other—and then *you'll* take this Lobster into camp."

Valdivia swore. Blunston debated, but was beaten. He begged, and was derided. He pulled at his cowlick as if to pull protestations out by force: Sam merely sawed the air with gaunt gestures of determination while he put the finishing touches to his toilet. Though he did his task of copying through a mist, Bill had to comply.

"The side where the light shows on that dark fort—that will be the weak side."

Gruger stood erect in those appropriated garments. Except that the boots were somewhat too big for him, the outfit might well have been his own.

The sun had come up, as if there had never raged any storm on this fresh earth; the sky was a strip of azure velvet above the road between the sycamores, and a chorus of birds—song-sparrows and warblers—greeted lustily the new morning. One ray of yellow light, avoiding the sullen and disregarded captive, fell upon Sam's lanky figure, never more soldierly than in these garments of a simple civilian. A wisp of red hair strayed across his forehead; his freckled face was earnest, his jaw set; a mere lad, his wild plan con-

fessed him a rashly foolish one—but, for all that, splendid.

"You're c-crazy!"

"I'm going."

"I *wish* y-you'd——"

"Tell Wayne to look for the light. Tell him to expect it some time before twelve. Or no: *just* twelve. That's the hour he set himself, and he's such a stickler for regularity and obedience."

"*Sam*——"

"Good-by."

"G-g-good-by!" Bill sobbed the farewell.

Gruger turned. He started north along the river. A moment more and the farther curve hid him from the sight of those he left behind.

It was then that the prisoner took his first verbal part in these new developments. It started with no more than a laugh, but that laugh was one of assured, even triumphant, derision.

Blunston scowled:

"What ails *you?*"

"Nothing. I'm thinking of what will soon ail your green young friend. He'll never live to show that signal, even if he can make Johnson think that a man with my name could have red hair. He'll *never* live to show the signal: I won't tell you why, but I *know!*"

Valdivia's laughter ended in a malevolent grin.

"Wh-what d'you m-m-mean?" gasped Bill.

"None of your business what."

But that grin carried a chilly fright to Blunston's heart. He made a trumpet of his hands.

"S-Sam!" he called. "H-ho, *S-Sam!*"

It was too late: he got no answer. Too late: although he ran a good hundred yards along the short cut in the direction in which Gruger had started, there was no Gruger to be seen.

CHAPTER XI

"BOAT AHOY!"

And then a fresh fear shook Bill—shook him, body and soul.

It came upon him without warning—at first, it seemed, without reason. It was exactly as if some power outside of himself had seen a certain sight and brought the news of it:

Suppose he had lost his prisoner?

In that eager quest for the vanished Sam, Blunston had passed the short cut's upriver curve, necessarily leaving Valdivia unguarded. The fellow's good arm was secured, Bill thought, and he was hobbled; but he had been carefully hobbled so as to permit his walking a little, the better to facilitate his transfer to Sandy Beach. Brief as Bill's absence had been, the Carib could easily have employed it to hop into the bush and conceal himself there, or to begin a labored journey to the home of some neighboring Tory concerning whom he had perhaps received instructions before quitting Staten Island and the British lines.

At once, the thing appeared possible. So soon as it appeared possible, it appeared likely.

With a few minutes' start, a man might hereabouts defy detection for hours. He might eventually even get clear away, no matter how heavily handicapped. These woods were full of excellent hiding places;

there had been several strange disappearances among wanderers from Sandy Beach camp and among the spies from time to time sent out by Wayne. Some cases were set down to desertion, others to treachery: nobody knew just which of the Hudson Valley farmers were at heart loyal to the Colonies' cause and how many in secret clove to the King.

Sam, anyhow, was irretrievably gone, and there was a chance that Valdivia's gloating hint of trouble for the lad who took his place was inspired by a desire to send Blunson after Gruger and thus give the Carib an open way to freedom. Bill, therefore, had clearly only one course open to him: he rushed back to the scene of the accident and capture.

The fear had been justified, the warning true. That spot was empty of every living thing, except for this panting boy whose round gaze wildly sought what wasn't there.

"G-gone!"

The trees rose thick and silent above the masses of underbrush on either side. In the churned-up mud, stiff legs extended, lay the dead horse. But of José Valdivia not a single sign could anywhere he seen.

Not a single sign? Blunston, too, was a bit of a woodsman: he started a frenzied search, regretting, too late, that he had not applied the same methods in seeking Sam.

Bill looked at the brush, for the most trifling movement of a leaf—and found all still. He looked for telltale tracks: the footprints of the trio had beaten out a maze where their brief fight occurred; yet, beyond this, were those mire marks left by Sam's

advance to the fallen animal; separately came those indicating the stranger's attack, and, side by side with them, was plainly charted the route of Bill's own assault when he returned here for Gruger's rescue.

"There *m-m-must* be something m-more," Blunston assured his sinking heart. "L-lobsters haven't wings, so this one d-didn't *f-fly* away!"

But no——

But *yes!*

Out of the maze and toward the river side of the road showed three widely separated indentations in the mud. They were those of a hampered, booted person hopping swiftly and on tiptoe. They led straight to a natural hedge of wild blackberry bushes that formed a veritable wall, into which the tracks almost miraculously disappeared. Nor was this all: some of the thorny twigs were freshly broken.

Bill gulped. He had found what he wanted. He pounced.

After all, not more than a few minutes had been lost. The hobbled fugitive could not have got so very far away.

"C-come out o' th-that!" bawled Bill, brandishing his weapon as if to corroborate his words: "R-remember, I have the p-p-pistol and you haven't a-anything!"

Never a sound replied.

With the pistol grasped firmly in one hand, he crossed his arms before his face to protect it as much as might be against the briars. He lowered his head and butted at that vernal wall.

It gave way slowly and stubbornly, resisting every half-step's advance. Many a long year of undisturbed

growth had woven and matted those branches, tempered and sharpened those thorns into something close upon the quality of steel. The limbs held with a well-nigh human determination; the needles ripped already ragged clothes and scratched hands already scarified.

Nevertheless, some slight degree of flexibility must have been forced upon the jungle by a recent passage through it: Bill shoved on his course at a snail's rate, yet with certainty. He was sightless, because he dared not raise his head lest his eyes should be permanently injured; he was worn out by the unwonted trials and activities of the past several hours. Yet he had two sustaining emotions that merged into one purpose and urged him forward:

Somewhere ahead there was an escaped prisoner who belonged by right to Anthony Wayne—somewhere, a fugitive whose keeping of a secret had, or so he boasted, rendered Sam Gruger's new mission doubly dangerous. At all hazards, this Carib must be recaptured and hauled or driven to Sandy Beach for trial and punishment.

Bill's progress resolved itself into a series of plunges, each of them a dive upon sharpened nails. He could have howled from the agony of it; but he bit his quivering lower lip and pressed on. Down his bent face to its cheek bones, thence dropping to the ground, trickled moisture that might be sweat, or blood, or tears: he didn't care. His sole preoccupation was to keep going.

That thicket was endless—and then it ended.

With unexpected suddenness, his lowered head struck empty air. He lurched into an open space. A clump

of weeds caught his forward-groping foot: he pitched over it and fell.

Some shock he suffered, nothing more. The ground here wasn't stony, not just here. Moreover, his tumble had been noiseless, and that was well, for there his enemy stood, unsuspecting, not six yards away.

"Boat ahoy!"

The former sailor's voice rang out fearlessly. His back was turned. Evidently, he had assumed that Blunston would run far after Sam—run, it might be, until Sam was overtaken.

The clearing extended right down to the river. Somehow, Valdivia had freed himself from his bonds, likely sawing them against an edge of that partially submerged rock whereon one of his boots now rested. He poised, at all events, upon the water's edge, and was looking intently upstream.

Bill looked, too, and what he saw was far from comforting:

There rested the British frigates. They showed no undue activity on deck, but from one of them a fully manned skiff had put off. An officer stood in its prow, and six oarsmen were pulling hard toward this very stretch of shore.

At first without sound, waving a hat, or his uninjured arm, the British messenger had managed to attract attention from those Britishers afloat. Now the rescuers were so near that he could even risk directing them verbally.

"This way!" he vociferated. "Give a bit to starboard!"

Near? They were not an eighth of a mile distant,

and every sweep of their rapid oars was bringing them far closer. The early sun glittered on those raised blades, on the stirred water, on the brass buttons of the officer's coat.

Bill bounded up and leaped forward. He would surely be seen from the river, but there was no time to worry about that.

"D-don't m-make another s-s-sound!" he warned.

Valdivia spun about as if gigantic hands had twisted him. His dark cheeks were flushed as red as that eyelid which lolled redly wide; on his mouth was frozen a wide grin that slowly turned from one of triumph to one of malignant rage.

"You fat little——"

He was going to charge.

"Do what I s-say," Bill ordered. "You c-can see you'd b-b-better."

His pistol was in direct line with the messenger's breast. Moreover, Blunston, whose hands were bleeding and whose face was grim, gave every evidence of being a murderous customer.

"What do you want?" the Carib demanded.

"I w-want to shoot you," said Bill honestly; "b-but I'll try not to if you'll r-run back to the road the w-way you came—and start in-instanter!"

One glance Valdivia gave behind him to the river that had so lately promised escape. From the oncoming boat, somebody called something: neither man nor boy ashore could make out what it was.

"Instanter!" cried Bill, and, with a lunge, he brought his pistol's barrel into sharp contact with the Carib's breast.

Valdivia opened his mouth to shout for help—then thought better of that idea. Blunston clapped a hand over his open lips, but, immediately assured of silence, moved swiftly to the rear and there trained his weapon upon the small of his captive's back:

"M-march—and make it a qu-quickstep!"

No further delay followed. Uttering only a muffled curse by way of protest, the messenger strode across the clearing and flung his body into the blackberry jungle. Bill heard more calls from the river, but concluded, as the green curtain closed behind him, that the boat's crew suspected the whole incident was some ruse to capture them, devised by a party from Sandy Beach: there came no noise of a landing being made, and presently warder and prisoner were working back toward the road without either fear or hope of pursuit.

"It's easier g-going than 'twas coming," Blunston explained to the Carib, "f-for me, I mean. You see, being ahead, you k-kindly save me half of the p-p-prickle stings."

CHAPTER XII

IN THE SPRING-HOUSE

Sam Gruger, when he left Bill and Valdivia beside the latter's dead horse, little guessed at a certain evil chance even then lurking one bare hour ahead. His brain held no more detailed plans than those he had just sketched aloud. Innocently, he assumed that a whole day of forced inactivity extended between him and the darkness chosen for his return into the British lines. His immediate purpose was merely to pass it so well hidden as to escape discovery by any well-meaning searchers who might be sent from Sandy Beach to spoil his project. Thus he beat into the bush on the west side of the road, only a few paces after its turning, and began to forge in the general direction of the hills beyond.

It was a healthy appetite that diverted him. He didn't possess Blunston's ability to eat anything any time anywhere; but he had been working hard and was hungry. He remembered the spring-house for which Bill had set out.

"There'll be some milk there, anyhow," he told himself. "And other things," he added.

Both boys knew the place, although neither had ever seen its owner. It stood near by, where the thicket ended and the fields began—at the extremity of a farm in the possession of a man called, Sam recollected,

Wolfert Van Velzen, a descendant of old Dutch settlers, who was said to have resented the neighborhood of soldiers until Wayne's commissariat contracted with him to furnish daily part of the camp's food supply.

"Nobody'll have any business here much before ten or eleven o'clock," said Sam, at the outskirts of the brush.

Nevertheless, he crouched for a full minute more in hiding: there was no use running the smallest risk of being seen by some farm hand who could report the trespasser's presence to the provost-marshal. Sam carefully scanned the picture unrolled before him.

A wide meadow ran away to a distant lane beside which towered the gabled and tiled old farmhouse. Smoke issued from one of its many chimneys, but nobody was in sight either up there or anywhere nearer. Woodland and bramble thickets walled the meadow on its three other sides, and just here a low log shack, covering about twenty square feet of land, had been constructed over a spring. From this spring a rivulet flowed through the lush grass.

"All serene!"

A thick oaken door presented the proper entrance, but this had hitherto always been padlocked, and Bill's predatory excursions had usually involved wriggling along the bed of the stream and coming up, inside, through a generous opening in the floor around the bubbling spring. Now, however, when Sam crept far enough forward, he found the padlock open and dangling loose and harmless from its hasp.

His first thought was that the farmer, or one of his hands, must be occupied with some chores inside.

Sam dropped to what he called his "hunkers," slipped a grasp to the door and, drawing it ever so slightly free, peeped through the narrow crack thus provided.

That was enough. The inviting spring-house was empty.

"Here's luck!" Gruger congratulated himself on it. "I've had enough wettings for a while, anyhow. Old Van What's-his-Name seems to've been a bit careless when he last left."

Still, hungry as he was, the lad gave one more look at the surrounding landscape to make doubly sure that the departure he spoke of had not been too recent. No, there was not a soul to be seen. Meadow and lane could not be emptier; even the cattle must be pastured in one of the more distant of Wolfert Van Velzen's fields.

Sam drew the door wider open. Then, closing it tight after him, he entered.

Outside, the day had begun to grow warm; but here a grateful shade brooded coolly. The sole light was supplied by a high and narrow window traversed by a stout iron bar; yet this had already revealed enough to whet a tired boy's appetite.

On rows of shelves along the walls, neat earthenware crocks were ranged temptingly. Several blackened hams swung within easy reach from the low ceiling. A basket of eggs adorned a corner; a big platter of butter reposed at the hole in the floor giving access to the spring, and, near this, stood and beckoned, full of creamy milk, an enormous can so spacious that a child could have comfortably bathed in it.

Sam licked his chops and began a more thorough

inspection. That inspection included sampling. The sampling rapidly developed into a meal odd, perhaps, but by no means meager.

Here, on a milking stool, waited a carving knife, ready to slice ham. There a ladle and cup lay. Upon this shelf, a spoon seemed simply pleading that he use it to relieve those jars of their pickles and preserves.

"Too bad there's no bread," said Sam.

He fared very well, nevertheless. In fact, he gorged for at least thirty glorious minutes. But he couldn't afford to stay much longer. He filled his mouth just once again and reached into a pocket to find some coins that he might leave in payment for all those good things consumed.

"How much ought all this to be?" he pondered.

A shilling? What were the current market prices for milk, raw eggs, ham, pickles, and preserves? He didn't want to be mean, but he wasn't rich. Certainly one-and-sixpence ought to do.

"Rat-tat-*tat!*"

Three knocks sounded from the outside of the door —the door which he had carefully left closed behind him, but had left, necessarily, unlocked.

He caught his breath.

He didn't want to be caught here, absent from camp without leave, at the start of an unauthorized adventure, with all the false evidence pointing to him as a thief, and with a full knowledge of Wayne's severe regulations against such raids upon the countryside. What——

But the door *was* unlocked! Why should anybody, who could see as much, knock at it? Anyhow, farm-

ers and the men under them didn't knock at their own spring-houses. Come to think of it, nobody knocked at a spring-house.

"Rat-*tat*-tat!"

The summons was repeated.

Sam could see no place for concealment here—his first survey had demonstrated that there was none. Of course, he might plunge into the spring and work his way through to the rill outside. But there was something about that knocking which sounded as furtive as it did imperative.

"*Rat*-tat-tat!"

Gruger remembered his change of clothes: he no longer wore the Continentals' uniform and so would not stand revealed as a wanderer from Sandy Beach. Well, then, he would see just what all this strange knocking was about.

It sounded more like a signal than an ordinary demand for admission. If it was a signal, he could make only one conjecture as to the correct response. He was pausing beside the shelf, on which he had intended to leave payment: upon this his knuckles promptly beat as close an echo to the call as he could formulate.

His guess was a good one. Immediately, the door swung slowly open.

Sam waited in shadow; he could not be clearly seen. On the other hand, he could not clearly see the newcomer, for the sunlight was behind that personage. At first, Gruger noted nothing except the silhouette of a broad figure, stooping but forceful, and an outthrust bullet head.

"Huh?"

That guttural noise came from the doorway. In it there was a further challenge.

"Well," said Gruger, because he did not know what else in the world to say, "who are you?"

"Don't you know?"

The man came on with doubtful steps until well within reach. Then he clapped a pair of powerful hands on Sam's shrinking shoulders and turned him to the barred window.

Gruger's first impulse was to resist; but he overcame it. So far, he was merely being scrutinized: since the light fell almost as freely on one of them as on the other, Sam would make a similar use of the opportunity.

He saw a hulking fellow of perhaps forty-odd and in the prime of a great strength. Tangled hair fell over a low forehead. The sun-baked cheeks were half hidden by a matted beard; what of the mouth was visible looked cruel and heavy, and the cavernous eyes gleamed balefully.

Some hint of the truth reached Gruger then. He weighed his response to the question that had been asked him:

"How can I be sure who you are?"

"You heard the signal. If you come to that, who are you?"

So it had indeed been a signal! The truth loomed larger:

"And I returned the signal," said Sam. "You can see I'm personally a stranger to you, anyhow."

Not yet did the man's hold loosen. He bent closer.

It seemed as if his blazing eyes must uncover every secret that hid within their range; but Gruger gave back gaze for gaze.

"You *are* a stranger—personally." The man at length reluctantly drew back a pace.

"So I ask," Sam persisted, though his pulses beat fast, "who are you?"

"One o' their new ones, eh? Late—and a new one: late because you're new. I'll tell you, then: I'm him you'd expect here—I'm Van Velzen. Now, what's the good word from Staten Island?"

The whole truth had come out at last! This query was all that had been needed to make everything entirely plain. Of course, the British could not maintain their messenger service between Stony Point and Staten Island without help from Tory sympathizers, or paid agents, scattered through the country between. Of course, there had to be rest stations along the route: places where a spy could pick up additional news, or hide if pursued, places for rest, too, and refreshment. This was one of them; while brutal Wolfert Van Velzen, the farmer, sold food to Wayne's camp, and gathered information there, he at the same time worked shoulder to shoulder with the British!

Sam did not know which he wanted more to do: run for the door, or wield the carving knife that he had returned to the stool where he had found it. As a matter of fact, though, both these courses were at present impossible, for the traitor's broad body was planted between Gruger and the way of escape, and the stool stood at least two yards away. Moreover, a shot must certainly bring people from the farmhouse,

and Van Velzen looked as if, in a simple hand-to-hand fight, he would have all the chances on his side. It behooved Sam to employ all possible prudence.

"Everything's all right on Staten Island," said he.

Apparently, he did not play this much of his part badly. The farmer's hands dropped to his sides, he asked:

"The last one o' you as come here talked of a new gun shipment bein' overdue. Hain't it turned up yit?"

"Not that I've heard." Gruger felt a quick surge of pride at his small success. This encounter might yet, he thought, prove profitable. He had unearthed a spy station; he could perhaps find out other details valuable to Wayne, and, in any case, the process ought to provide excellent practice for this evening's planned venture. Self-confidence rose higher; Sam even added, "But I'm too fresh in the army to hear much, and I'm being sent to Stony Point more to ask than to tell."

"To ask what?"

"Lots—about the new bastions, for instance, and which one's finished."

The words were scarcely out of Gruger's mouth before he realized the folly of them, knew that he had been betrayed by his over-assurance. His messenger service must be frequent, must be practically continuous. Those bastions, important as they were, would therefore be one of the things concerning which the Crown forces on Staten Island had recent and full information.

And black-browed Wolfert Van Velzen realized it, too. That he knew it, his next words and his next

action proved. He started; his red lips tightened above his beard; the suspicion that had lately dwindled in his sunken eyes flamed—leaped—became a veritable conflagration.

"You were ordered to find this out?" he roared. "You tell me so? Then you lie! Why, the fellow as went south through here day before yisterday took that message with him!" Like a gorilla of the jungle the farmer looked; like a gorilla he stooped to attack. "You're none o' us, whoever you are! *Who in thunder are you?*"

He waited for no answer. He charged.

It might have been that some facile explanation could yet have stopped him, but Sam could think of none. He made no verbal attempt; his self-reliance was temporarily shattered, and he retained only the passion for physical defense. The wall was close behind him; he couldn't retreat in that direction: he ducked to one side and, flinging an arm upward, swept the nearest pickle jar at the enemy.

That crock struck Van Velzen on the chest; the earthenware broke, and its dark contents deluged him. But he was not delayed. Rather, he was goaded to a furious energy that still retained touch with his native caution: he charged on.

If Sam could only evade him, only get to the door and through that into the meadow beyond and the near-by bush! Once given an opportunity to run, he could show this gorilla a clean pair of heels.

If only——

But the gorilla was aware of that. He cunningly

swerved enough to prevent Sam from circling him and making an exit.

Gruger was desperate. He reached for his pistol, regardless of consequences.

"No, you don't!"

The farmer interpreted the gesture and arrested it. His two hairy hands clutched Sam's right arm just above the wrist. The boy staggered backward; one leg overturned the basket of eggs: he felt the shells crunch under his slipping feet.

His gave him a hint of a new danger. If he were forced six inches farther backward, he would shortly be immersed in the pool. An avenue of escape stretched thence, but only if he took it head first: wide although the opening was, it was far too narrow for him to turn in, and it was deep—the farmer could easily submerge him there and, holding him below the water's surface, drown him.

Which was exactly what this traitor meant to do! Gruger, on the instant, somehow received certainty of that. He looked into the wide, dusky face of his opponent and there, written on the cruel mouth and in the gloating eyes, he saw the warrant for his execution, signed and sealed.

"I'm going to drown you, as I would a mangy kitten!"

As clearly as if the threat had been spoken, Sam read it—and he knew that no appeal to mercy would now save him from an enemy murderous with anger and desperate from fear of betrayal.

Sam shut his eyes and flung all his weight in the other direction, shoving against the hands that, grasp-

ing his right arm, sought to employ it as a pole to push him backward. During a second—during two seconds —during three that seemed a veritable eternity—the contest hung even.

But it might not long remain even. Whatever of youth was on Sam's side, all of weight was on the side of Van Velzen, and here was the sort of indoor contest in which weight ought to prove the determining factor. Gruger wrenched himself one way and the other; the farmer, with astounding agility, shifted his own position to suit every change and preserve his leverage. The arm had bent at its elbow; the elbow pressed sickeningly into the pit of Sam's stomach. Inch by inch, he was forced backward—inch by inch nearer to the edge of the bubbling pool.

And then those broken eggs took charge of the fray. Gruger tried to brace his body by his heels; on the jelly of yolks and whites beneath them, his boots slipped. They shot between the farmer's legs and toward the door—away from the spring they shot—but the rest of the boy's body crashed downward and, the suddenness of that fall breaking Van Velzen's otherwise firm hold, Sam's head struck the floor at the very edge of the spring.

All would have been over with him, save for a single detail; but this detail saved the day. One of his flying feet caught the unbalanced traitor's ankle, and, as effectually as they had worked on Sam, those impartial eggs now worked upon Van Velzen. He tottered—he tumbled. He did not fall on Gruger, because, falling, he veered so as to avoid the spring; yet, as he crashed downward, his chin caught the side

of that vast milk can: it turned completely over his head and rested there. While the can itself covered the farmer from head-top to chest, its contents must have blinded his eyes and all but choked his gaping mouth.

Sam was up long before the other could rise.—He was out of the spring-house and confronting the still deserted meadow.—He was deep in the thicket.—He was a quarter of a mile away, and going at a rate which Van Velzen, if he followed, could never hope to equal.

CHAPTER XIII

SHORT SHRIFT

At Sandy Beach, outside that little log farmhouse which served Anthony Wayne for headquarters, the stolid sentries confronted a group of idle soldiers who had followed hither in the train of an unusual procession. This was made up of a foreign-looking, shamefaced man crossing the compound, an officer of the guard beside him, while close behind pressed a dirty fat boy in ragged clothes that steamed under the summer sun, a boy who resolutely pointed a then utterly unnecessary pistol at his prisoner's back.

Inside the bare room Sam and Bill had yesterday morning spied upon, Wayne sat at his desk, a little while later, presiding over a hastily summoned drumhead court-martial whose grave-visaged members were gathered around him. Their session was now nearly concluded: José Valdivia's trial drew toward its end.

Wayne faced the accused:

"Have you nawt to say for yourself in your own defense?"

The Carib's lolling eyelid watered, his mouth drooped at its corners, then twisted upward in a sneer. But words he had none: he merely shook his head negatively.

Bill, upon his entrance, had told with an increasing stammer exactly as much of the matter as he thought

Blunston pointed an unnecessary pistol at his prisoner's head.

it wise to tell, which omitted a history of last night's frustrated expedition on Stony Point. His chronicle somehow left the impression that the boys had gone out just before dawn on a fishing excursion.

When he heard that his protégés had played truant, the commander's wide stare filled with wrath. Wrath grew, moreover, at Bill's mention of absent Sam's present enterprise. Still, after Wayne had studied those copies of the British dispatches nervously handed him, there did steal into the leader's keen countenance a change of expression the nature whereof Blunston was at a loss to determine.

It was then that the court-martial followed. Every attempt to extract testimony from the accused turned out, however, to be fruitless. He refused to give any information, and his malign face, with its flat nose and that crimsonly drooping eyelid, remained an impenetrable mask. A hooligan he might be, a hired spy working for pay, not patriotism; but he stood true to his employers, and, if this loyalty appeared further to enrage his judge, it produced a certain admiration elsewhere in the court.

Nevertheless, there was only one verdict possible. Bill's halting statement left room for no other, and the copies of the dispatches proved the clear accusation. Valdivia, to get to this countryside at all, must have passed through the American lines at some stage of his journey; hired or enlisted, he was in the British military service now, just as he had once been on a British privateer; finally, when captured, he had worn, not a uniform, but civilian clothes—he was disguised.

These points alone composed a perfect case against him.

The court-martial's decision was immediate and unanimous:

"Guilty!"

Perhaps the prisoner did not wholly realize the penalty entailed in this finding. He heard it without moving a muscle.

"*Have* you nawt to say?" Wayne repeated.

Valdivia was mute.

"Then," said the commander solemnly, "I pronounce sentence. You have been ably defended by Lieutenant Knox, appointed to that duty. You have had a fair and square trial. The verdict is just. A spy, you must hang as one—in half an hour. And may the Almighty God have mercy on your soul."

No, the convicted man had not foreseen that punishment. For a moment, breathless silence filled the small room. Then, tempestuously, Valdivia was roused to protest; all his reserve broke down.

He considered himself a mere messenger—had been told at Staten Island he would be so considered in the event of capture—had assumed he was on trial merely in such a rôle—expected at worst a long term in a military prison. His face twisted, his clenched fists beat the air. He swore. He raved. He cursed his captors, cursed the court.

"Take him away," said Wayne.

Guards laid hold upon him—he broke loose. While they struggled with him, he passed to frenzied argumentation.

"I didn't see nothing when I was inside the American lines! I didn't look for nothing! I didn't come to look for nothing! I——"

"You are too late with such statements," Wayne insisted; "and these facts, if facts they be, could not count, anyhow, one way or ither. Too late, I say. You were given no end of talking chances during your trial, and you would not avail yourself of them.—Take him to the guardhouse and have the chaplain sent to him!"

Still fighting madly with his warders, the Carib began to beg for mercy. Now his voice cracked, now his cries rocked the room.

Bill couldn't stand it. He turned his big, sober eyes away. *He* had done this, he himself had brought Valdivia here, it was upon Blunston's evidence alone that conviction was secured! In the high elation caused by the capture, these possible details of its results had never once entered his imagination. Of course, nothing beyond clear justice had been done; but the boy understood at last how terrible justice can sometimes be.

"Please—*please*——"

Somehow, Bill had crowded forward to that cowering, screaming wretch's side and was pleading for one whose abandonment of manhood and surrender to fear made him despicable, but who seemed, for exactly that reason, to be at last so helpless as to make his hanging almost a murder.

"What's this?" Wayne demanded. "What's this, Blunston?"

"D-don't k-kill him—please. If I'd only had the sense to re-realize—I wouldn't h-have—I mean, I d-don't believe I'd have——"

Wayne interrupted with no more show of feeling than might a statue vocally endowed:

"The trial is over. Clear the court, men! Sergeant, leave me alone with the condemned for five minutes; in another capacity than judge, I have summat to say to him before the chaplain attends him to shrive his soul."

Along with the rest, Bill passed perforce into the fresh air of the free day. While the officers broke into knots for the private discussion of what had happened, Blunston shouldered his way among the group of curious men, in an endeavor to pass through it. He wanted to be alone and to try to forget.

That desire it was impossible to satisfy. The soldiers stopped him; they gathered around him; they plied him with a score of questions:

"What's the verdict?"

"Where'd you scotch him?"

"How?"

"Had he any papers on him?"

"Did he come from Stony Point?"

"Say, did anything turn up that'll make an assault likely?"

Blunston tried to be as uncommunicative here as the prisoner had been indoors. Eben Jones, usually in evidence when aught of importance occurred, was conspicuously absent: likely he was still nursing his stripes and his strengthened hatred of Bill, who had caused their infliction. But half the headquarters com-

pany were on hand, and they one and all knew the boy's weakness:

"Come on and tell us!" they wheedled.

"D-da'sn't," said Bill.

"Aw, it'll soon be known everywheres all over the camp!"

"D-don't want to t-tell."

"Bill, I've got half a cheese under my bunk—snivvied it last night—an' ef you'll jes'——"

For the first time in his life, the orderly declared:

"I a-ain't hungry."

Amazed though they were at that, they would probably have squeezed some news out of him had not another incident occurred to distract their attention. From the farmhouse issued the prisoner, scarcely more than identifiable because of surrounding soldiers with fixed bayonets, at their head that sergeant who had had charge of the guard during the trial.

This procession moved off at a rapid pace across the parade ground, among fluttering yellow butterflies, toward the gloomy guardhouse at the compound's end. Every idler began to follow as closely as discretion allowed, each man elaborately pretending interest in something else.

So Bill was left a moment solitary, as he had wished to be. His china-blue eyes sought the ground.

"Blunston!"

Again had his desire been thwarted! Masterful Lieutenant Gibbon appeared at the doorway to Wayne's headquarters. He had called, and now he was beckoning Bill.

"Yes, s-sir!"

The orderly lumbered slowly over. He saluted his superior.

"Come inside. You're wanted there, and I've been sent to fetch you," explained Gibbon.

Without another word, he led the way into the narrow hall.

CHAPTER XIV

AT MIDNIGHT

Clearly, there existed no great secrecy about what was now going on. The door to the commander's office stood wide open, and Gibbon promptly left his charge upon its threshold, which gave a full view of nearly everybody and everything within.

Wayne, as none knew better than his orderly, always had his own way; but, among his officers and off public duty, this scion of Yorkshire preferred to take what he wanted gracefully—when he could. Otherwise, he would seize it anywhere, as his rank permitted, without bandying of words. Thus he would sometimes drop formality, only to resume it upon no notice whatever. Thus, too, he was at present momentarily informal.

He leaned against the farther wall, as nearly negligent as he could ever seem. Flanking him on the right stood florid Light Horse Harry Lee, his nimble fingers twirling by its hilt the curved cavalry saber which, sheathed, he had propped in front of him. Richard Butler, of the Ninth Pennsylvania Regiment, stood at Wayne's left. Gibbon had gone in, and he and Knox and other members of the staff and chief officers waited around.

Bill shamelessly cocked his ears. A low buzz of

expectation floated out to him. Soon, across this, cut the brisk tones of the commander.

"Gentlemen," he began, "we are about to have a council of war."

Everybody became alertly silent. Everybody, that is, except Lee. He looked at the raftered ceiling and puckered his lips. Either he knew what was coming and had already said his say in private, or else he recalled—what all present should have recalled—that, under Wayne, "a council of war" meant merely an issuing of orders.

"Major Lee," said Wayne, "cease whuzzling."

Lee's whistling ceased. He bowed.

"Gentlemen," Wayne continued, "it is proposed that we march to Spring Steel's this afternoon, rest the men there for five hours and then, under cover of darkness, assault Stony Point at midnight."

Bill gaped. Wayne looked about the room, at one officer after another. His nasal voice had been about as excited as if he were proposing a hunting trip.

Lee remained rigid. His companions drew breaths so sharply that Blunston distinctly heard the chorus of them. Himself, he put a hand against the door-jamb to brace his suddenly unsteady weight. From his present position, he could look through the room's open window and catch a glimpse of the river and the wooded hills extending northward. Somewhere along that stream or under those trees, his friend was waiting for night to make a little less uncertain his mad attempt to enter the enemy's fort and secure the news which would justify the assault here so calmly announced.

And yet José Valdivia had said that Sam could never succeed! The Carib had said it, and Bill had in turn reported it to Wayne.

"I called you all together here," Wayne concluded, "to receive the benefit of your opinions."

Light Horse Harry smiled. His smile said plainly:

"To what use will you put them? You've never any use, you know, for any opinion that runs counter to your own."

But the rest of the officers simply gasped again.

"Come! Come!" snapped their leader, standing erect now and frowning heavily. "Don't splutter and whirken ower it. You object? Well, then, let me hear your frank objections."

He must have known them thoroughly: Washington himself, in his highest capacity, had uttered them in this very room no longer ago than yesterday—and they were obvious. These soldiers, brave as they had ever shown themselves and anxious as they were for action, would be certain to express the same objections simply because they were theoretically correct. Still, it accorded with the epoch's etiquette that the request be put to them.

Wayne paused. Then:

"You, Gibbon," he asked, "what do you think of the plan?"

The generally masterful Gibbon showed signs of confusion:

"I understand that General Washington——"

"Leave such phases of the matter to me."

"Well, sir, of course I do not know from whom this suggestion issues——"

"Don't know who made it?" Wayne threw back his head. "I'll tell you: *I* did."

"Oh, but in that case, if I may say so——"

"Never mind manners, man! What do you *think?*"

Gibbon was compelled to plain speaking:

"Egad, I think the plan has only one chance in a thousand."

"That is about what General Washington remarked," Wayne dryly responded. "I agree with him and you —and I have a liking for long chances.—Hubley?"

Adam Hubley, Lieutenant-Colonel, was a shallow man across whose face fearless honesty had hung its portrait. "The thing can't be done," said he.

"No?" Wayne smiled grimly. "There's a Yorks proverb, Adam: 'Him 'at's mead up his mind 'at he can't deea a thing, maistly makes up his mind afoorhand 'at he weean't try.'—Chambers, what say *you?*"

Rubicund Colonel Chambers wanted to be told in what element of the plan his commander trusted.

"In the surprise of it, to be sure," came the quick retort.—"Butler?"

"I don't believe you can be in earnest, sir. Why, there isn't one officer in our army that would stake so much on so little."

" 'Cepting me, Butler, 'cepting me."

Bill throbbed with an impulse to applaud. Sam would be up there at Stony Point to-night and was sure somehow to be detected—although all Blunston's endeavors to find out how, and why Valdivia knew it, had proved vain. Nothing short of a quick and successful assault would save Gruger from execution,

from the fate there to which José had been here condemned. Let the assault be speedy, then!

Meanwhile, inside the room, shallow Hubley was again speaking:

"A surprise will be somewhat difficult when preceded by a march across near fifteen mile' of open and at least partially disaffected country."

Wayne glowered:

"The order of march would be my responsibility, sur."

"Then there's the question of those bastions——"

A snap of the fingers prefaced the commentary. "Pah! I'm fair ill of those bastions!—Knox?"

Butler's boldness and Hubley's honesty had but lightly affected the dashing Knox:

"I'd give my head if you'd go, sir—and me along with you. But if you do go and fall, why, the whole of the Colonies will call you mad."

"More of that anon, Knox."

Wayne paused. Once more he looked around; once more he saw, from the faces before him, that nearly all these men were in theoretic agreement with one another. Each man was personally courageous, each anxious to have the assault attempted; yet most of them were unwilling to advise to that effect, restrained by respect for Washington, by military custom, and by fear of the consequences among the populace should the project be undertaken and result in failure.

Wayne fixed his eyes on the cavalryman:

"Major Lee?"

"Yes, sir?" Light Horse Harry smilingly lowered that attention which had been persistently fixed upon

the rafters throughout this whole session. Apparently, he had been giving it but small heed.

"What do *you* think?"

"Why, suh," drawled Lee with his habitual carelessness, " 'coorse *I think* exactly whatever *you* do."

Such discussion of plans in advance of trying them was indeed foreign to Wayne's nature; he preferred to announce what he intended to do and then issue the commands necessary for its doing. This talk had gone far enough for him, and he now stopped it at the first excuse: Lee's half-favorable, even if half-ironic, reply to his inquiries. With never so much as a smile, he folded his arms across his brass-buttoned tunic and announced:

"Quite so, Major. Gentlemen, I'm sartain you are every one of that mind. You must be, because there's no other way to save Connecticut and so to save the general cause. Therefore, this council of war stands with me, unanimous."

A smile went around. If Wayne saw it, he pretended not to. It was, anyhow, a smile of relief: everybody did want to go.

"Hubley," he pursued, "I'll relieve your mind about those bastions, and so relieve every mind here of any thought that I may be disobeying General Washington. The General told me not to advance until I knew which bastion was unfinished, but implied I might make the attempt when, if ever, I did know. So I promised yon spy Val-thing-a-majig his life if he'd tell me—and tell me he did. He's never been there at Stony Point, but the last messenger to return to Staten Island said to him 'twas the *north* bastion. Knox, the Colonies have

thought me loony lang last; let them *say* it lang last: 'Mad Anthony Wayne.'—Gentlemen all, we march at high noon."

He had committed them to it, but it was, after all, a commitment to what they were burning to attempt, albeit on his responsibility. Bill began a stammering cheer, which they, not noting its source, took up with a will.

"The time for that will be when we've won," Wayne severely interrupted, although manifestly not ill-pleased. "To your various commands and quarters now and make ready. Detailed orders will follow in proper course."

Past Bill they trooped, glad, but a little awed. The room was empty, save for Wayne.

"Blunston!"

Bill crossed the threshold, radiant.

"Y-yes, sir!" he saluted, touching his irrepressible cowlick.

Down his long, straight nose, Wayne looked at the boy:

"I sent for you because I wanted you to hear what you had done for the cause by bringing me in that scrannel San Domingo Staten Islander with the outlandish name. 'Twas a fine deed, lad, and won't be forgot."

"Yes, s-sir. Th-thank you, sir. But Sam Grugruger, he d-did as much as m-me." Bill grinned all across his fat face. "Now we'll t-take Stony P-Point in time to get Sam safe out of it all wite—'case he's in tr-trouble—won't we, sir?"

The simple kindness that underlay all the military

disciplinarian in Wayne softened his nasal voice and prompted him to put an arm around the shoulders of his orderly, as he replied:

"I wanted you to know about that, too, lad. You must abeer the flaysome truth. The British are as quick to hang a spy as I am, and my drummer boy's not one to save life by tale-telling, even if they offer him the opporchunity. He'll try to enter Stony Point fort long before we attack—and when he tries, I fear me he'll be lost. The blackamoor told me more than the facts about those bastions; he told me how 'twas Sam Gruger will have to reveal, without meaning to, that he's not what he up there pretends to be. Happen so, 'tis the end of him surely. Hark to me and be brave, boy Blunston. Yon ragabash said . . ."

CHAPTER XV

JOSÉ VALDIVIA'S SECRET

Sam Gruger rose and stretched himself. He was stiff and sore, that was the price of his adventures, and now, hours having passed since his incursion upon farmer Van Velzen's spring-house and his escape therefrom, he was quite ready for another meal.

Once certain that, if the traitor had attempted pursuit, it was a failure, Gruger had made all possible progress on his journey. Then as a necessary precaution for his nocturnal mission, he had indulged himself in a long sleep. Into this sassafras thicket a good five miles from the river, the light, filtering through emerald leaves, warned his forest-trained senses that day had already begun to decline—and he had planned to reach his still distant destination at a moment when supper exercised its most quieting influence upon those British soldiers who would have partaken of it.

The thought bore its own troubles:

"I want food myself as bad as if I was Bill Blunston!"

Those crushed ferns whereon Gruger had made his rough bed sent up an appetizing aroma. Wild strawberries peeped from the untrodden grass; after a dip in a pond full of yellow lilies from among which plover ascended in fright at his plunge, he ate all the fruit

that he could find; but, even so, he recommenced his journey ravenous.

So far, he had carefully avoided the direct route to Stony Point, making wide detours, and this course he had decided to continue at least so long as the sun maintained a place above the horizon. On territory between a pair of opposing camps, and with such folk as Van Velzen inhabiting it, avoidance of human contacts was imperative.

Imperative, yet hard—when he was so nearly famished. He attempted to cheer himself by humming very softly while he ploughed along:

"Tell me, what did Katy do?
Did she mean to trouble you?
Why was Katy not forbid
To trouble little Katy-did?"

The words ran through his mind as the tune crossed his lips, without joy. The heat was less than yesterday's, but sufficient: his red hair, still damp from his swim, was the damper from sweat; this ran in runnels down the dust of his freckled cheeks. His lengthy nap had not accomplished its chief purpose: he was still weary.

Careful always to work in a generally northerly direction, he sometimes skirted fields and, bent low, glimpsed again and again farmhouses at which he yearned to beg a bite of food; but, for the major part of his way, he stuck to the edges of the woods. Here rabbits that he longed to catch bolted almost underfoot; from the branches of wild tulip trees, common then in this district, squirrels scolded his trespass upon their domain. He unpleasantly recalled having heard at

Sandy Beach how pumas even yet left the Adirondacks for nightly hunting along the Hudson's shores. Once a deer looked at him, with calmly wondering eyes, from a clump of poplars. Steadily, too, time, all this while —time, as much his present enemy as the British army —crept on and on.

Tired!

"There's a big day's work to be done 'tween now and midnight," he admonished himself. "I just must keep going."

> "Wrong indeed at you to fling,
> Hurting no one while you sing
> 'Katy-did! Katy-did! Katy-did!'"

Time—time—*time!* The more speed he put forth, the more delays he encountered. His woodlore to the contrary notwithstanding, he lost his way, and lost a good half-hour in retrieving it. He executed a vast circle to shun a solitary cabin that looked suspicious for no other reason than its very solitude. And all the while, no matter how he hurried, time hurried faster.

Here was what appeared to be a harmless cowpath bordered by larches with a ditch behind one row of them. He struck into it, but had not gone ten furlongs before he heard the voices of men coming in the direction opposite to his own:

"What with Parliament and Congress and all——"

Sam ducked between the trees and plumped into the ditch.

The voices drew nearer. There were two of them, each pitched in a querulous key:

"Things is so that a body don't know which side it's safe to take up with."

"That there's 'xactly what I say. Jes' las' night, over to Tattnal's Tavern, I was sayin' to Aritas Brewster, I said——"

Here were a couple of farm hands wanting only peace and lacking any prejudice for either Colonies or King! Yet Sam's caution had not been unfounded: they might have been two more Van Velzens, ardent partisans of either cause, or outposts of either army, and he was still determined to risk no explanations until he reached the lines on Stony Point. Moreover, arrant neutrals as their talk proclaimed them, there was no telling how they might seek to serve their private interests if they found a dubious-looking character hiding in a ditch. Gruger had to wait until they were safely past.

Then he took to the woods again.

These terminated abruptly some fifty minutes later, and at their termination he met with another mishap. A stream crossed his course here. He jumped it, but his physical weariness must have dulled for the moment his mental skill. He miscalculated, slipped on the other bank, and wrenched his knee.

He soaked the hurt with water from the rill and stood up lamely. To his left the sun was sinking behind somber hills; at his right, low forests stretched toward the river; a lone bald eagle winged, above, its solemn flight homeward. There was now neither man nor house anywhere to be seen, but directly ahead, against the north horizon, rose darkly and ominously Stony Point.

Toward that height, Sam stubbornly limped.

The knee was not badly injured, with use, it would be better shortly, but the present pain and the continuing hunger did sharpshooters' work upon the rear-guard of his resolution. Suppose, despite his prayers, he was detected? It was scarcely likely that any member of the garrison at the fort had recently come there from Staten Island; yet some one *might* have come, and might know José Valdivia, or ask, anyhow, casual questions whereto Gruger could furnish no answer. In that event——

He wouldn't think of it. He limped ahead.

Somehow, his idea of flinging out a signal from the fortress began to look more difficult of realization than when it blindingly burst upon him that morning. It began to look to him much as it had then looked to Bill. It began to look childish—fantastic—impos——

No, *nothing* was that!

He wouldn't think of the signal, either—not just yet. He would wait the fixed time, then seek the opportunity. Now, rather, he would fix his mind on the tottering welfare of the Colonies, the endangered reputation of his adored commander, his own honor that he had virtually staked upon this night's enterprise.

"Must!"

Because now had come the hour for boldness: he was at last arrived again at the foot of the hill, and the first twilight reached it with him. His single safety lay in bravado. As if he had nothing at all to fear, as if he were in very truth a British messenger of Colonial speech gladly regaining territory that was in British

occupation, he began laboriously to follow the twilight up that steep ascent.

He had assured Bill that to-night would not be like last night. Well, there was nothing like last night about this part of it, anyhow! He climbed from another starting point in the final afterglow of a clear day, and in profound stillness. Then stealth had been employed even during a storm; now he had better be brazen in the quiet.

Upward he went. . . . Up. . . .

Where were the outposts?

Sam forced his voice to song in its deepest chest notes that sounded nearest to a full-grown man's version:

"But, while singing, you forgot
To tell us what Katy did *not*:
Katy did not think of cold——"

There emerged a ridge of rock; it was ten yards ahead and well above him. Did something stir upon or behind it?

Keep on, Sam!

His heart jumped, but his voice didn't flutter. He continued climbing and singing:

"Flocks retiring to the fold,
Winter with his wrinkles old,
Winter that yourself foretold
When you gave us Katy——"

"Who goes there?"

Upon that ledge a sentry had risen. His back was turned westward and to the mounting hillside, so that, like Van Velzen at the spring-house door, he was

merely an imperfect silhouette, a shadow blending into shadows. But his leveled musket was as unmistakable as the one seen amid the thunder, eighteen or twenty hours ago.

"Friend!" ejaculated Sam and came to as full a stop as if he had been turned to stone.

"Advance, friend"—but the weapon never swerved a hairsbreadth—"and give the countersign."

Gruger swallowed hard. He tried his best to retain the voice of maturity—and to shut off a suddenly impulsive quaver:

"I don't have it. How should I have the day's password?"

"How not?"

Sam was in for it now. He summoned all his courage and put into his answer all the loftiness he could master:

"I am the expected messenger from Staten Island, of course. Stand aside, and let me pass!"

It was the first test. Would it succeed?

There followed a pause of quite a quarter-minute. Along his musket the sentry, as Sam well guessed, was peering intently. Then he spoke again and in a tone as crisp as a whip crack; it was a prepared formula:

"In that case, give me the customary password for such messengers."

A special and unchanging shibboleth for the Staten Island line-runners! *That* was something which, of course, José Valdivia knew, but of which Sam, never imagining the possibility of its existence, had not thought to inquire when he prepared for this foolhardy attempt. And now a knowledge of it, or something

clever enough to stand instead of that knowledge, was all that could rear its shield between Gruger and destruction!

The Britisher leaped lightly from the ridge and advanced, his musket steady, unwavering:

"Speak up!"

They were close together at last, the man and the boy.

"I——"

Speech congealed on Gruger's lips.

For there arose another contingency that had been overlooked, it might be fatally. Sam's face was close to his challenger's, which showed itself broad, puffy, pasty white, bearing a pair of small eyes afume with suspicion. This was the very face, and these the very eyes, seen just so by last night's lightning: the same sentry Gruger had then seen—*the man that might now at any second recognize Gruger, or perhaps already recognized him!*

CHAPTER XVI

THROUGH THE FORTRESS GATE

Sam was no mollycoddle. Born and brought up in his father's Susquehanna pioneer village, he had heard gunshots almost as soon as he heard his mother's lullaby. When he was twelve years old, he loaded hot muskets thrust back to him for that purpose by the defenders of smoke-filled Pecquay Blockhouse, while Chiquesalunga Indians attacked the settlers herded there. His boyhood was passed in a hunting country. Twice he had brought down black bear tottering toward him with terrible claws raised to rip flesh from bone, and, no longer ago than '76, he was caught in a backwash of the Lancaster Tory Riot and wielded an effective club against the mob that then charged the local "Sons of Liberty."

Those were experiences to try one's nerve. Added to them, his brief military training proved equally beneficial, nor were his most recent adventures by any means minor. Here, however, had developed an ordeal of a sort entirely new.

He was confronted by a suspicious sentry with whom he had lately been face to face in another character: a man whose curled forefinger visibly itched at his weapon's trigger, the barrel near to Gruger's chest.

This time there would be neither lightnings to confuse the soldier's aim, nor yet any intervals of darkness to cover flight. Even when José Valdivia's pistol was clapped to the boy's head back there on the river trail, the lad could have secured temporary respite by handing over that dropped wallet, whereas here the price of precarious relief was the utterance of a password which he could not give because he did not know it. That, or——

"Speak up, I say—or else put up your hands: a prisoner!"

Did this Britisher already remember him? The chances had been nearly all against such a renewed encounter. Gruger approached from a fresh angle, at a new hour, was to make as short a stay as proved possible. But he had been mad, and so had Bill, not to think of this faint possibility when his plans were formulated.

Sam's fancy pictured a hollow square of redcoated troops and impassive officers. He saw, in his mind's eye, the gallows.

It was toward a similar scene that he had himself sent the cursing Carib when leaving him in Blunston's charge for conveyance back to Sandy Beach. Sam could well-nigh regret that duty done.

He found words, but they sounded to his own ears halting and unconvincing:

"I tell you I am——"

"Then prove it."

Did those queer little eyes recognize him? If they did, there was no use wasting time. Better to draw a pistol and perhaps be shot down, rather than to attempt

prolongation of a parley that must otherwise end at the end of a rope:

"If you'll let me——"

"You can't prove it! One of them messengers? They've been getting younger and younger; but you're a mere ninny-boy. I don't know who you are, and I don't care—only you're a spy, surely."

Thus shone forth the first ray of hope: Gruger *wasn't* recognized—yet! Those flashes which had revealed to the boys this pasty-faced sentry, they had apparently half-blinded him! Sam's courage rose, and a comforting sense of superiority rose with it. He took again the high hand:

"Will you let me finish what I am trying to tell you? I was substituted in a hurry. That's why I am so young, and I suppose that is how, too, that they forgot to give me the word. I will put up my hands, but only to prove you a zany." He raised his arms above his head. "Take from my breast pocket the wallet full of papers you'll find there, and then send them to Lieutenant-Colonel Johnson and see what *he* says!"

The Englishman's throat swelled with chagrin. He feared a ruse, felt that, anyhow, this lad was laughing in his sleeve at him, and yet on its face the offer was too fair to be denied, especially when to make an arrest might be to make trouble for himself as well. Mistrustingly, he lowered his musket, discovered the wallet, secured it.

Curiosity scrawled itself across his face, but a stubborn pride, too, a pride that would not let him look twice at what he held. By a cord around his neck a

whistle hung; he put it to his thick lips and blew.

Echoes rattled reply. A soldier, he might have been the sentry's twin brother, came running around the hill and stopped with eyes goggling.

"Take this 'ere paper to the old man."

"'Arry, *wot* is it? 'Ave you got a——"

"Take it!"

His wonder unsatisfied, the second soldier retired the way he had come. That musket now hung in its owner's arm-crook, but it was poised for instant action.

"May I lower my hands now?"

"No."

Moments passed—interminable moments. . . .

"Are you very busy here at Stony Point?"

"No."

"There was gossip at Staten Island about the new bastions. They said that one was finished about a week since. Is the other——"

"No!"

This second negative was uttered in a manner calculated to block further talk. There seemed to be nobody near, and, ready as it was, 'Arry's weapon could not reach his shoulder again much before Gruger might draw José's pistol from the belt beneath his coat. Yet Sam thought no more of trying to escape—just then. Not only because such an attempt might prove desperate: Lieutenant-Colonel Johnson might receive the tale of the forgotten password as suspiciously as the sentry had received it, but, anyhow, to run away now would be to fail in a high mission and perhaps put the garrison on the alert against Wayne's

march through the valley below. Here Sam stood at the threshold of his desire. The welfare of his young country and the honor of Anthony Wayne were one step nearer a just possible rescue.

Time ticked on, though; whole minutes slipped by. Gruger's arms ached. The afterglow dwindled, and the shadows lengthened. He must enter the fort, lull all doubt, get his information, somehow leave and reach Spring Steel's before midnight.

He tried to read the hour by the purple sky——

"Keep your head still! Look at me."

"Why?" Sam's nerves were raw with worry. "You are not very pleasant to look at."

The sentry's throat swelled once more, but he choked his anger, kept silent.

How long it all took! There was nothing to be seen except this pasty-faced creature in red and the bleak hillside around him, rising toward the darkening zenith. In those violet heavens beyond and above the soldier, a star lit its lamp. Another followed; then a third.

Finally, from somewhere among the rocks of the summit, from somewhere in the invisible fort, a clock began to strike. Sam counted the strokes eagerly. There were nine of them.

Three hours! Even if he were not arrested, he would have only three hours, or less, in which to——

Here came the other soldier back again.

"Well?"

"'E's to follow me."

Pasty-face muttered something into his collar, but moved a pace to one side. His companion-in-arms

shifted his own weapon to a ready position and bade Sam walk at elbow.

They moved off. They mounted. They turned the hill's flank toward its top.

Here a dark bulk showed amid the deepening darkness, and, beyond deep-dug trenches, the fort rose high: bleak walls, a central tower, battlements—gloomy and forbidding. Gruger looked hard to right and left, to search out the new bastion, but he looked in vain; night had put on her cloak, and its sable folds hid everything.

"Get along—get along!"

They were challenged by another sentry. When he was satisfied, a huge door, nail-studded, opened behind him complainingly. Sam was marched rapidly across the threshold, across a dim court and so into a barely lighted hall.

"Here you are!"

As his warder's voice spoke, another door was flung open. The warder stuck his head in:

"It's 'im as says 'e's the messenger from Staten Island, sir!"

Thus was Gruger announced to the British commander at Stony Point.

CHAPTER XVII

THE KING'S HEALTH

For the smallest fraction of a second, the brilliant illumination of this room dazzled Sam, but he soon made out that he must have been shown into the officers' mess. Around a table covered by the wreck of a mighty dinner, the hungry boy from the half-starved American camp saw a score of faces regarding him above scarlet coats, for the most part unbuttoned at the throat. They were of every type, from young subaltern to hardened veteran, and at the table's head sat he who should be their chief.

Realizing this personage's rank and importance, Gruger studied him as rapidly, but as thoroughly, as the circumstances permitted, nor was the resulting impression favorable. As a matter of fact, the table's master lolled rather than sat at his post: a heavy, blond man, his mouth drooping at the corners loosely, his idle fingers toying with the stem of a freshly filled glass. You could read him like a book; he was as confident in his bearing as Wayne, but, diametrically different from Wayne, he was lax because confident: he was sure of himself because scornful of his rebel enemies.

Incongruously, there was something about him that reminded the new arrival of Dorsey Ullinger, the vil-

lage drunkard in that Susquehanna settlement which had been Gruger's home. Wretched Dorsey Ullinger used to rob the mattress wherein his widowed mother stored her scant savings; then he would spend them at some low riverside tavern and, becoming maudlin, fall into paroxysms of affectionate grief if anybody mentioned mothers or sang one of the many pathetic ballads about them then current.

It was incredible, but it was true. Dorsey Ullinger, except for rank and uniform, was about what this hard-breathing officer showed himself to be, and yet this officer was, for all his easy posture, undoubtedly the dreaded Lieutenant-Colonel Johnson, in supreme command of His Britannic Majesty's forces at Fort Stony Point!

Nevertheless, this was no occasion to return scorn for scorn. There was not even a moment to be wasted in odious comparisons. Whatever Sam's present status might be assumed to be, he was presumed to have seen some little service. What, he asked of his young memory, was the regulation British salute?

He had, of course, seen it often in the days before the Revolution began. But now——

No, he found, to his infinite relief, that he had not forgotten it. From a dust-covered corner of his memory, he hauled it out. Indeed, he made it snappily, clicking his boot heels together—hadn't he always wished that his own army indulged in these flourishes?—and, the operation accomplished, he stood perfectly at attention.

In response, Johnson's right hand made a hazy motion that ended halfway in its design and returned

hastily to his glass, as if he feared that some one might steal the wine, should he leave it a moment unguarded. The gesture was almost careless, was certainly haphazard, and yet his loose lips smiled.

"Late," he said thickly. "You're late.—He *is* late, isn't he, Major Morgan?"

Then Sam took account of another figure seated beside the commander, that of the man whom Johnson had thus addressed.

This was a lean, darkish person, whose Welsh surname could not conceal a strain of darker, perhaps Cornish, blood in him. His was a thin, hard face, the hair above it just touched with gray at the narrow temples, the nose roughly Roman. He had, Sam noted, kicked off his boots and sat somewhat back from the table, nursing one white silk-stockinged foot, as if those boots were new and had hurt him.

Physical pain, however, did not greatly distract this officer. His eyes, nearly as deep-set as farmer Van Velzen's, were frankly cruel, like that traitor's. They were mighty keen, also, and they squinted with unpleasant narrowness at the flushed and freckled newcomer.

Major Morgan may have dined just as well as had his superior. Doubtless he had eaten better and drunk at least as much. But he carried the effects with far more ease than did Johnson, or, for the matter of that, any of the rest of these fellow officers.

"Yes, the messenger is at least fourteen hours late," said Morgan, and he added, seeking corroboration, "Isn't he, Travers?"

He accosted a ruddy, choleric man directly across the table from him, who wore the uniform of a dragoon regiment and the insignia of a captain.

"Quite so," snapped the man, and pursed his lips in an unpleasant smile.

Sam felt chilly. He decided that, if trouble were to come, this pair, and especially Major Morgan, would be the most likely source of it.

The guttering candles—there must have been a full fifty of them in many-branched, silver holders—threw a yellow brilliance all around and about the board, yet left the rest of the room in a gloom that Gruger was unable to pierce, the more so as he dared not look too freely in any direction save that of the commander. His heart pounded so that he feared his nervousness would surely betray itself.

"I am sorry, sir," said he, talking only to Johnson, and perhaps too obviously ignoring those inimical subordinates. "I am sorry, but——"

Johnson made an easy gesture:

"Well, well, here you are 'tlast, and this time——" he nodded a heavy head toward what Sam immediately saw were José Valdivia's open wallet and its former contents which lay strewn before him—"this time the dispatches . . . not pressing."

He would have dismissed the whole affair thus. Sam's hopes ran high. But fate intervened in the persons of Morgan and Travers: they exchanged significant glances; the Welshman bowed to his chief, just a shade too obsequiously, and then murmured:

"If you please, sir, we should not forget that there was a serious alarm last night."

From across the table, Captain Travers nodded a sharp approval of this reminder.

"Poof!" The commanding officer waved a hand and purred. "Nothing but paid inquisitive farm bumpkins."

"The sentry, sir——"

"Little better than the farmer lads. No mil't'ry experience 'fore he came t'this cursed America. Boys had lives scared out of them . . . and that's the end of it."

Morgan bobbed a head at Travers, and Travers ventured:

"That may be, but I for my part trust you will agree that we should exercise excessive care, in view of the scare they gave. Our men were all most unsettled by it."

"But here are the dispatches." Johnson flourished a fat hand. "What more—more proof want 'bout this fellow?"

Would such a mood prevail? With all his heart, Sam prayed that it would, and from most of the mess there arose a rumble of assent. But Johnson's expressed desire had not been uttered with the weight of an order, nor were Morgan's suspicions easily downed. Suavely he requested:

"May I nevertheless put a few more questions to our guest?"

"Very well," Johnson grudgingly granted. "But make haste about it. . . . Must get on to the toasts. Have not yet drunk His—His Majesty, you know."

Back to Sam then Morgan turned his smoldering eyes:

"What delayed you so long on your journey from Staten Island?"

Since there was no getting out of the difficulty, Gruger proved ready enough at first. He told so much of the truth as suited his situation. He spoke of a missed way, of a horse that slipped in the mud made by last night's rain and broke its leg. He added a story of two Colonials who, in his version, only very nearly made a capture.

"But we hear that you do not have the prescribed password for messengers," persisted Morgan.

"I didn't even know there was one," said Sam. He could put genuine feeling into that phrase! "I am a substitute, and the substitution was hastily arranged. The intended messenger was hurt at the last minute. Perhaps they forgot to give it me because of the haste."

"A substitution?"

"Yes, sir."

Morgan's glance sought Travers'.

"Odd."

"Deuced odd," said Travers.

But again Sam had his story ready—in the sacred service of the Colonies:

"The man chosen for the task got into a tavern brawl. He was drunk, and he was shot in the abdomen, or so I heard. Volunteers were called for; among them, I was chosen."

"Ver'—very commendable," Johnson interrupted. "I'm sure 'twas ver' commendable . . . your part . . . volunteer.—Can't you see 'twas, Major Morgan?"

The whole proceeding bored Johnson, and he did not hesitate to show how much it bored him. He had

been paying only the scantiest attention, anyhow—and paid a good deal more to his glass. Now, following his lead, as that of their superior, most of the other officers, their brief curiosity long since satisfied by Sam's narrative, were beginning to talk among themselves of matters foreign to a mere messenger's mishaps.

Morgan, however, provided the exception, he and Travers. The Major bowed a second time to the Lieutenant-Colonel, but went on with his slow inquisition:

"Commendable, sir—if true." To Sam he said, as he twitched those papers about before him: "Name of Valdivia, I see." Gruger's throat unaccountably filled; he was glad that the table shaded his legs, for his knees became nervous: they wanted to knock together. "Hum. Santo Domingo. Partly Carib. Aren't you rather blond, my lad, for such an ancestry?"

"Exactly," Travers nodded. Evidently, he took most of his cues in life from Morgan. "Too blond by half."

Sam hesitated. "That letter is in error," he then asserted. "It was written for the original messenger and was not changed, because, as I tell you, time pressed. My name is Samuel Gruger, and I have no Carib blood in me."

"Egan, *you* don't look *Welsh,* Major!" chuckled the Lieutenant-Colonel.

Some of the half-attending officers laughed dutifully at their superior's joke. Its butt, however, showed annoyance. As if he were accusing Sam of a crime, he repeated the sentry's objection to these excuses:

"You are ridiculously young to be chosen for such a task, my fine fellow. Why, you are no more than a callant."

Sam suddenly resolved to abandon his submissive attitude and stake something on a play into the commander's hand. He did his best:

"I hope to outgrow my youth, sir—sooner or later."

At that the now listening company fairly roared so soon as they made sure that Johnson's sides were shaking. The Lieutenant-Colonel took up the metaphor of a card game:

"'Gad, he has you there, Major! Holds three—three trump—a *jeu de règle*—wins this hand of écarté. And enough of it. We're all satisfied the boy's what he—he says is. Are we not, gentlemen?"

A chorus of assent answered.

"Hi!" pursued the commander. "Where's that cullion of a servant? Fetch lad glass."

Sam had indeed scored. It looked as if he had quite triumphed. But *had* the point won been worth while? Morgan scowled; this choleric Travers was frowning, too.

"Sir—" began the Welshman.

There was, however, a line of discipline which even easy-going Johnson's subordinates were not permitted to pass:

"Enough, I say!" bellowed the Lieutenant-Colonel. "And fresh glasses all 'round," he added to the servator at his elbow; then: "Mister Gruger . . . join us." A pointed finger emphasized the invitation.

In the very flush of success, Sam felt a cold chill

creep up his spine. Here he was where he had toiled to be—and now?

Where was that liberty of movement which he had boasted would be given him? Certainly not in this drunken company, no matter how much it believed in him—and it still included two enemies! Indeed, the very trust that was accorded him by the majority held him a prisoner at table. How could he get the information so paramountly important? How could he ever signal it?

Here, as on the road—as he pretended it had done at Staten Island—time kept flying. It must already be after ten o'clock.

Yes, here indeed he was, inside the fort. But he had not the smallest idea of what to do next.

Other glasses were brought—good-sized glasses they were, too—and with them a large basket of dusty bottles. These latter were rapidly uncorked, though with deference to their age, and one was placed beside each diner.

Sam's sole safe course lay in apparent obedience. He loathed the whole alcoholic scene, feared every actor in it, notwithstanding that nearly all were just now friendly toward him; but he feared the soberest most. He went where Johnson had pointed: he stood between the commander and the unbooted Welshman, Johnson beaming up at him from the left; from the right, Morgan, and from across the table, Travers, watched him askance.

Those glasses were being filled.

"One for guest—one for guest," Johnson ordered.

"No, not out of my bottle, you fool; I need all that's there: out of Major Morgan's."

"If you don't mind, sir," said Sam, "I have had nothing except some berries to eat since early morning —I'd rather have some food than drink."

"Nonsen'!" The Lieutenant-Colonel was offering a shaky glass.

Morgan's voice mounted, icy smooth. "You can eat later, in the non-commissioned officers' mess room: You say you're from Staten Island; then you have had more than one hard day of it, so here is your fortifier and reward: this port we brought with us; it has had two sea voyages and is all of ten years old."

Snapped Captain Travers: "Why, it's to be the King's health, of course, first of all! Don't you know thus much? You must pledge the King."

The cold that had frozen Gruger gave place to a fever heat. He knew it made his green eyes blaze as his warty hand took the proffered glass.

Johnson rose, somewhat uncertainly, to propose that toast with which the after-dinner drinking was started each evening in the British army. He propped himself by resting one fist on the table. He lifted high his own brimming glass, from which ruby drops ran between his white fingers.

"'S Majesty King George—God bless him!"

Everybody was up now. They leaned toward their commander. "The King!" those officers shouted in a bass chorus—and drained their wine.

But as they rose, Gruger's gorge had risen with them, or against them. He held his glass not by the stem, but by its cup, thus concealing the contents. He

"He has refused to drink to the king!"

did not let even his lips touch the liquid; while the company drank to his country's enemy, the boy lowered his arm quickly and poured the port on the floor.

"God bless him!"

Not all on the floor. That commendation of George III to the bounty of Heaven ended in a queer cry from dark Major Morgan. He jumped back and lifted to his chair a foot encased in white silk: the stocking was splashed red.

"What do you mean?" he cried at Sam. Then he swung around to Johnson, to all his companions. "This callant has dumped his wine. He has refused to drink to the King!"

CHAPTER XVIII

MURDER MENACE

Back at Sandy Beach, Bill Blunston had stumbled away from the log farmhouse and his interview with Wayne, a boy in the abyss of despair. Lips once accustomed to grinning were tugged up and down by rough sobs only just suppressed from utterance; tears now quite frankly fogged those eyes of china-blue.

"Yon ragabash José told me there was a special password at Stony Point for Staten Island messengers —and the mawky mowdywarp didn't give it to our Samuel Gruger."

That had been Wayne's revelation. He went on:

"I had already passed my promise of immunity in return for correct bastion information, or that Carib might be swinging high as Haman now. Yet I don't blame him entirely. He played the game of war till I scuffed him. Supposing Sam had the word, those Lobsters would be sartain to trip him up some way."

So it was as good as all over with Sam! Bill had feared it from the first, but corroboration from Anthony Wayne made the thing as sure as if the earth even now covered Gruger's coffin. Blunston reeled into a compound full of sunshine that to him was darkness.

There is no such place for rumors as an idle camp,

and sometimes the rumors are true: the most closely guarded secret of a coming movement is always guessed before orders reveal it. Here, in a little while, the commanders of the various units would be making arrangements sufficient to hint of what was afoot, but the truth preceded them. The spy was not immediately hanged; accordingly, word flashed around that, because of some data found on him, the longed-for assault of Stony Point might, after all, be attempted.

At once the air became electric. The sentries were doubled to prevent anybody wanderingly inclined from carrying gossip to neighboring farms. Thrilled knots of men talked excitedly in corners. To the rawest private, the next rawest explained his perfect plan whereby alone the attack could succeed. Every mature fighting man was happy—save one.

Bill, seeking a retired spot in which to be alone with his grief, encountered that one back of the log-house at the very spot where, so short a while since, two then careless lads had played at eavesdropping. It was pock-marked Eben Jones, bared to the waist and lying prone. Having an acquaintance of old duration with the lash, he knew how most quickly to cure its effects: he exposed his purple welts to the sun.

Bill saw them—long, angry ridges, artistically laid on in lateral parallels. At the same moment, Eben raised his cross-eyed glance and saw Bill.

Jones got to his feet. His face worked:

"Come here."

Blunston stood still.

"Come *here,* I tell you!"

"D-don't have to."

Eben squinted. "What air you cryin' about?"

"I a-ain't." Bill's right arm passed its sleeve rapidly across his eyes. "I a-ain't crying," he indignantly protested.

Since he would not come to Eben, Eben slouched toward him. For a moment, insulted and resentful, Bill stood his ground, counting on the advantage he possessed because of this man's recent and severe punishment.

But for a moment too long. Jones was in manifest pain; yet he would be able to march with the rest to Spring Steel's. He would be able to fight—to kill. Before the lad's realization of this could translate itself into retreat, his throat was seized by Eben's outdarted grip.

"That tongue o' yourn got me a flogging. One good turn desarves another, they say, an' never yit have I took a wrong without requitin' it tenfold."

He bent closer. His fingers tightened. His hairy chest heaved. His foul breath, sickeningly strong of stolen rum vainly consumed to assuage physical hurt, beat on Bill's face. Futilely the boy clawed at his tormentor's iron arm.

"Don't think this is vain vauntin'. S'help me, I'm goin' to fix your tongue so's it won't wag ever no more!"

Vaunting? Back across Blunston's mind swept the memory of those tales he had heard at home and repeated to Sam: of Eben among the bloody Paxtang Boys, stabbing out innocent lives at Indian Town—

Eben jailed for the beating of that old Philadelphia Quakeress—Eben suspected of the murder of Jacob Zook.

No shout for help, were any help near, could issue now from Bill's squeezed throat. His heart hammered against his lungs. His temples felt as if they would burst. Before his eyes, the blue sky went red—and then went black.

Was this death?

Jones read that question in the protruded gaze:

"Oh, not here an' now!" he laughed raucously. "I'm no sech fool as to reesk sufferin' fer your young hide. We're goin' to attack to-night. I been listenin' here at a hole in the wall, an' I've heard—what I've heard. All right—in the dark. Many a soul'll go out o' this here life in that dark, at the enemy's hands. *Yourn*'ll go out—at mine!"

He flung from him his victim-to-be. Bill crashed against the log wall.

"Now you got somethin' pretty to think about—and you can't escape me, 'cause, you know, my space'll be near you. Let your limber tongue tell *this* tale. You can't prove it—and my word's as good as yourn!"

He strode away.

"Blunston!"

That call came from the other side of the farmhouse. Bill answered it, panting.

Eben was right. Nobody would believe such a threat as he had made—none of the officers, at all events. The men who knew him would believe it; Blunston was convinced of it. Yet even had his supe-

riors been credulous, he would have had to take care of his own life. He refused to incur their scorn of unmilitary tale-bearing.

No, not though he still shook with nausea from the late assault, not though his throat was bruised without and agonized within, not though, now, the mere thought of Eben set knees to knocking! Bill would, he must, simply keep eyes open and avoid his enemy as he would shun the plague.

Nor was there, at this juncture, opportunity for accusation. The voice that had summoned him back to work was Wayne's own, and the behests it issued through the ensuing hour kept the lad so busy in a whirlwind of preparation that he had small time either for grief at Sam's plight or fear for his own. The stern commander had thoughtfully provided his orderly with such seconds for sorrow as could be spared: now came the hour of duty to country.

Wayne sat at his portable desk with the countryside map before him and company rosters and quartermasters' statistics in heaped papers at either hand. A few officers stood near to supply facts when needed. One took down from nasal dictation orders that his superior signed with quill pen and flowing signature: "Anty. Wayne." Other officers came—received verbal instructions—hurried away. To still others, Bill, after being given time to "tidy" himself, was dispatched with the signed documents or summons to report at headquarters immediately. Everything was done crisply and quickly, yet with a clarity and thoroughness that proved it had long since been thought out. And Wayne, the genius of the affair, delegated

to no subordinate one iota of the work which his own unbounded energy and capacity were able to perform.

"This to Major Lee!"

"Colonel Chambers, what was the exact strength of your regiment at roll call this morning? Not on paper —actually.". . .

"Lieutenant Gibbon, verify these figures."

"Colonel Butler—Lieutenant Knox, what is the exact distance between those two roads at these two points? And what are the roads' conditions, relatively?" . . .

"The regiments of Colonels Febiger and Meiggs will form the west column——"

"Blunston, my compliments to Majors Hull, Murfree and Posey—and have those gentlemen here in three minutes."

Stiff formality framed all his words; the last trace of Yorkshire dialect had left his speech. He was the soul of rapidity without losing precision, and he showed no material signs of haste. He did not gesture, his powdered pigtail hung motionless, every one of the double row of brass disks in his blue coat was buttoned.

Bill, when present, found it impossible not to succumb to this powerful personality. He knew well enough the size of the task here being performed.

"Now, gentlemen, I am through." Wayne closed and locked his desk.

No questioning of his subordinates as to whether he had forgotten any details. He stalked out of that low-ceilinged room as if about to pay a ceremonial call, and, his staff following, proceeded to the point

from which he had reviewed his troops with Washington.

Bugles sounded. Company by company, the regiments formed opposite. Row upon row of buff and blue, fluttering flags—for there was a slight breeze again—gleaming arms.

Just behind his commander, Bill stood, over one plump arm the bridle of Wayne's bay horse, Butter-Tubs. The boy caught Eben's slow squint. Jones was with the headquarters company lined up near by. He squinted a repetition of his fatal threat. Bill understood that; he began also to understand Wayne's perilous plan of action.

Its chief factor must be secrecy. By various routes, in order to avoid unfriendly observation, and all to converge quietly at a given point within seven hours, this daring strategist must march thirteen hundred and fifty picked men across some fifteen miles of doubtful and certainly difficult country, without allowing any rumor of the movement to run ahead. Then he must rest long and undetected at the foot of a height held by an enemy more powerful than its opponents, and, finally, he must scale that height and conquer its guardians through sheer force of surprise.

Already he was indicating this by coolly issuing an amazing order:

"We are to go toward Stony Point, rest at Spring Steel's and thereafter attack. On no account is a single shot to be fired, either on the march or during the subsequent engagement. The assault will be won or lost solely at the bayonet's point."

Bill gulped and started so quickly that Butter-Tubs

reared. Wayne stopped long enough to look, out of the corners of his wide eyes, at the staff, which failed to conceal its astonishment. But on that he made no comment. He resumed:

"To make sartain that no timid or impulsive person uses his musket as aught save a lance, all the small-arms' ammunition on your persons will be brought up here, company by company, and the totals vouched for by the regimental clerks, whereafter sartain small amounts will be placed in custody of each company's stretcher-bearers, under a trusted sergeant and a detail of men, for possible re-issue after the engagement. And any violation of those sergeants' trust will be punished with instant death."

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE DARK

Of open opposition, of course, there came none; but the phenomenon that followed proved to Bill's view as sullen as it proved strange. Even in those days, an infantryman was taught that his musket was his best friend; he soon considered its bullets its brains: the bayonet became a mere unintelligent tool. These soldiers felt themselves being personally bereaved. They resented, moreover, the command of common caution as a mistrust of their good sense. They would have evinced verbal resentment had they not a healthy fear of such complaints' results. Still, most of them loved their strict, yet considerate, chief, and nearly all of them had heretofore implicitly trusted him. Therefore, with long faces, but with ready hands, they carried out his order.

As an orderly, Bill bore no musket. He had a knife and might be able to defend himself with it, to some extent, in an open struggle with a face-to-face enemy. Yet there stood Eben Jones: *he* would not hesitate to fight foul in the consummation of his revenge. Eben, Blunston was sure, would not think twice before using his bayonet from the rear.

Thus the boy made no offer to surrender that one of Valdivia's pistols which had luckily passed into his keeping. Easing Butter-Tub's rein, he drew the

weapon from his belt and surreptitiously slid it down a leg of his breeches, whence he could recover it, unobserved, after nightfall.

Then Wayne spoke again. His high-pitched, resonant tones carried all across the parade ground:

"Column commanders will trust no civilian encountered en route. Advance and flank guards will search all houses passed in the line of march and take quietly into custody, without parley, everybody met with: men, women and children alike. These will be passed along to the rear, where officers will arrange that they shall follow—treated kindly, but kept under surveillance. No information must precede us."

Something like a stir of approval greeted this, at least. Then Wayne said his final word. He stood as stiff as a ramrod, the feather at the side of his three-cornered hat pointing straight to the sun, which was within ten minutes of mid-heaven. His tanned face looked calm, but dauntless resolution showed in firm jaw and blazing eyes:

"This expedition," he began, "is somewhat difficult——"

"Difficult!" thought Bill, edging closer. "It has hardly one chance in a thousand!"

"There are those," Wayne pursued, "who have, in prospect, called it impossible. However, I know my officers and men, and my officers and men know me. It cannot be demonstrated impossible until we shall have died in attempting to prove it otherwise—and we must die rather than live after failure. But to courage—to duty-doing—to him whose cause is just and who puts his faith in Almighty God and his own strong

arm: to him nothing is impossible. Be true to your young country."

Then at last emotion would no more be shackled. The speaker raised a clenched fist until his giit epaulets stood nearly upright; he raised his chin until the fold of flesh under it disappeared—and he raised his voice into which the old Yorkshire idiom forced again its way:

"Boys, we'll tak' Stony Point afore to-morrow morn'—an' I'm main sure o' it!"

They cheered. They forgot their forlorn condition, these soldiers of the Continental Congress, their ill-fed stomachs, their worn-out coats, their gaping shoes, forgave the seizure of their ammunition and the fears it had evoked, forgave and forgot everything in this bright promise, from the leader they trusted, for the battle they had so long desired: they cheered until their throats ached. Blunston thought of Sam and how he would have cheered as well, so he sneakily dabbed his china-blue eyes and, with Eben Jones' murderous squint fixed full on him, cheered lustily also, until Butter-Tubs lifted his glossy head and neighed in harmony.

Wayne wheeled toward his chief-of-staff:

"I shall take the salute."

Line after line, the troops swung past their chief, who stood, once more an impassive statue, a rigid hand held to his cocked hat. Those fellows' coats were patched, their feet were in many cases bare; but—this was their tribute to their new nation—every man was uniformed in resolution, and each man's hair was oiled and powdered, which last was their tribute to Anthony Wayne!

On and on they swung. They swung, shifted then to four-abreast, out of that detested camp and into the open country. The desperate adventure started. The various columns took their separate routes, but all bore along a generally northerly course toward Spring Steel's and Stony Point.

"My horse!"

While Bill held stirrup, Wayne mounted his sleek bay. The staff took to their steeds. Blunston had been assigned a pony for the march, a smart roan; it was picketed near at hand; he vaulted to the saddle and clattered after the others to the eastern column's van.

Under way, indeed! The sun blazed, the dust rose in stifling clouds, the land soon became rugged. To Bill, his heart sore for the fate of his friend, his brain full of renegade Eben's threats, time passed as it passes in a dream. The scouts, from forward and the flanks, brought in startled civilian prisoners until their number promised to require more guards than there was infantry.

Wayne encountered an avowedly Tory farmer whose imprecations against his captors' cause had, his weeping wife said, cost him a beating; the commander ordered the arrest of the offending warder.

"We are soldiers here—not torturers."

The ten-year-old daughter of another apprehended family wept by the roadside. Wayne reined in Butter-Tubs to demand the reason. She was footsore.

"Ah, ban! You'll ride wi' me, lass!"—And he swept her up before him.

The afternoon wore on, and wore away. The land-

scape was rougher, abounding in excellent sites for ambush.

Five o'clock.

Six . . .

Would they reach Spring Steel's early enough for the necessary rest? Would they reach it in safety? Those other columns, long lost to sight behind these hills and forests: what of them?

The scouts who preceded the vanguard were ordered to special vigilance, but no trouble came. It seemed as if the British felt—what Wayne evidently hoped—too secure in their new fortifications to consider outposts essential anywhere lower than halfway down their heights.

That—or did all this mean a trap? Perhaps the Colonials had already passed between opened, but unseen, jaws——

Six-thirty!

Then, in the sunset, the silhouetted bluff of Stony Point rising from the Hudson, perhaps a mile and a half away. Spring Steel's—and on time.

In the protection of a patch of hickory and chestnut, the prisoners were herded and the soldiers made to lie down. Sentries were posted, patrols flung out, horses picketed and muffled. One by one, the other detachments came in until all were accounted for. Silence reigned in the ranks, and all lights were absolutely forbidden. The night fell; the moon had not yet risen; the expedition soon huddled in utter dark.

Bill, now that his pistol could not be seen, restored it to its proper place. He listened, at the wood's edge,

while Wayne rehearsed the officers in his orders and gave final instructions for the assault.

"Remember, 'tis the *north* bastion that's the vulnerable point. To go astray and strike at a finished wing would be fatal."

They understood: the north bastion.

"Your regiments, Colonels Febiger and Meiggs, will constitute our right column, with your detachment, Major Hull. The Ninth Pennsylvania, Colonel Butler, and the two companies under you, Major Murfree, will form our left. Right van: a hundred and fifty volunteers, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Fleury and Major Posey. Left van: a hundred volunteers—Lieutenant Stewart. These, I understand, have already been secured?"

"Yes, sir."

"And no trouble, sir, twice the needed numbers offered themselves."

Bill had missed that. He wished he had known of it, so that he, too, might have volunteered!

"Both columns," said Wayne, "to move to the charge, when I give the word, with fixed bayonets."

"Will we have any advance line, sir?"

A distinct pause followed that question. When it was answered, the commander's voice bore a new gravity:

"Each column will be preceded by a detachment of twenty men. One of these detachments Lieutenant Gibbon has offered to lead, Lieutenant Knox the other. It will be their duty—these detachments'—to remove the abatis and other obstructions, if possible, so as to clear a passage for the columns which are to follow

close in the rear. To remove the obstructions *if possible.*"

Another silence, for every hearer realized how hazardous the duty of those lieutenants and their men would be. As if in frank agreement with the unspoken comment, Wayne then concluded grimly:

"Those are brave fellows; although they have just now closed their lists, they are already dubbing themselves 'The Forlorn Hopes.'" In the darkness, his nod of dismissal could almost be felt. "That is all, gentlemen. Do not forget, once in sight of the fort, that you are to bear to the left: the *north* bastion. We had the Carib spy's word for it, back at Sandy Beach. So go to your men now, standing ready for instant action—and may God defend the Good Cause!"

The officers retired, and Bill, expecting not to be needed for some little while, ventured to steal after them.

The lists of the Forlorn Hopes were indeed closed. Even if he were excused from his work as an orderly, he could not join either of these venturesome bands. Despite grief for Sam's almost inevitable fate, despite dread of Eben, and tumultuous expectancy in view of the impending engagement, Blunston, if only because of that long march, succumbed to his master passion. He was more than ready for the scant and cold rations that were being gropingly served to the men under the darkness of the hickories and the chestnut trees.

But as he sat on invisible moss, munching his scanty food, among nearly unseen companions, he felt a hot panting on his cheek. He smelled a rum-sodden breath

and heard, all too well, the lowest of human whisperings:

"I ain't forgot. You're thinkin' you kin keep on sneakin' clear o' me.—Well, you see you kin't.—I'll get you. This very blessed night, I will! They'll report you noble: 'Killed in action fer his country,' they'll report you—'cause they won't know no different. Jes' you wait: 't won't be long now. 'In action—fer his country—at Stony Point!' "

CHAPTER XX

WHILE ALL EYES WATCHED

"—refused to drink to His Majesty, the King!"

The officers' mess room at Fort Stony Point echoed with that stentorian accusation.

Sam Gruger jumped backward a pace. His emptied glass fell as he did so. It broke into tinkling splinters whose descent punctuated and accentuated the silence ensuing upon that accusation launched, only too gladly, by Major Morgan.

Instinctively, Gruger's wart-covered fists gripped the back of his chair as the haft of his nearest weapon. It looked as if a weapon of some sort, of any handy sort, would immediately be needed!

That long room had been heavy with the fumes of wine; upon the utterance of black-browed Morgan, the atmosphere instantly became charged with suspicion—with anger. Sam's green eyes blinked down a disordered table, dishes still half full of food, pushed toward its center; a glass or two overturned; the cloth spotted and jerked awry. Between twin rows of standing men, risen to drink the royal toast, their flushed faces all turned toward his own freckled visage, there he poised, his telltale cheeks turned, he knew, a fatal white.

At one side of him, Lieutenant-Colonel Johnson swayed, wig dragged crooked, lips working oddly. He

was trying to realize what, for him, was a well-nigh incomprehensible situation, yet he was the only one among all present that had not immediately understood, nor was he long to be left in the dark. From Gruger's other side, Major Morgan enlightened his commander with a veritable wealth of detail:

". . . Look at my hose for proof!—And see you: the fellow's very fingers are red!"

That Cornish Major jerked Sam's nearer hand from its clutch on the chairback, and held up the accused and helpless member as if its undeniably crimson stains were blood from a murdered fellow being.

Everything was changed now. A veritable volley of profanity greeted the exhibition, Travers' voice the loudest of all. As for Johnson, he was at first awed by the irrefutable evidence of such a crime; next, he made an effort toward impartial justice:

"Boy, what—what you've say for 'self?"

No fighting, even the most desperate, any longer possible! Gruger, in that Major's grasp, was already manacled. He summoned all his wits and all his nerve:

"Just this, sir: that some folks are too ready to misinterpret awkwardness." He dared to look straight at his fuming captor. "I am as loyal to my principles as any man here."

" 'Twas no accident!" Morgan vociferated. "His hand was steady."

"I can swear to that," chimed in the captain.

With one of those quick changes common to his condition, facile Johnson's judicial mood veered, however, toward leniency. "Don't be too ready swear."

The Major's response was practical. His unoccu-

pied hand refilled his own glass and proffered it to Gruger. "If the thing *was* an accident, let him try again."

Sam's gaze went back to Johnson and noted once more his physical resemblance to that far-away Dorsey Ullinger who stole from his widowed parent and then, unrepentant, although broken, wept at the merest mention of a mother. A physical likeness: could there be a mental, too? With perfect truth, Gruger said:

"But there is another thing, nor do I take shame for it. Before I left home, I did what many are asked to do—and *do*. I promised my mother to take no strong drink."

Led by Morgan, half the company guffawed, some in ridicule, some in unbelief. But among the younger men were several who showed that they had made, and failed to keep, that same promise; they were uneasy. Above all, the Lieutenant-Colonel was affected. He crumpled his napkin; his eyes filled.

"Promised—mother?"

"Yes, sir."

Morgan did not miss those unshed tears. He protested. "Wine is not strong waters."

"Nevertheless——"

"He's right, lad." Johnson was off on his former tack.

"Topers and teetotalers alike, all loyal servants of His Majesty drink His Majesty's health," the Major persisted.

At this down came the commander's open palm upon the table. Dishes rattled. "'Gad, that's *your* trick, Morgan—and you win the game." Hadn't an excuse

been provided for another glass? "The royal pledge doesn't count, lad. Gentlemen, a good deed can't be done too often. Fill up. Again: His Majesty King George the Third!"

Every face was bent toward Sam. What should he do?

There have been—doubtless will ever be—souls that, in similar plight, sacrificed themselves; yet Anthony Wayne's drummer neither had his own skin alone to think of, nor yet possessed this evening a zeal capable of slaying discretion. To the course adopted he was partly moved by his desire for serving the Colonies, by a faith that the Light Infantry waited, somewhere near, his pledged news, but he was also mightily moved by a quite normal dread of the gallows. He drank just enough to jerk his red head from the noose for at least a few more precious minutes; at the same time, he was youthfully minded of his allegiance: he had unobtrustively crossed the fingers of one hand as he raised his port with the other!

None could observe that precaution. "Well done!"

As quickly as the horizon had clouded, it cleared. Cheers went around, jibes were leveled at Morgan, who studied his empty glass while Travers busied himself with rolling bread pills. There had been only one suspicious circumstance for the chief portion of the mess, and Sam had removed it.

Yet he stood there, if the truth must be told, a trifle shamefacedly. He felt a traitor.

Why? He asked himself, and shook the sensation from him. His mother had anticipated no such ordeal as this just presented and passed, would have been the

first to urge him to save his life, and his ruse had temporarily succeeded. To that even the dark face of Morgan, when he grudgingly released his hold, bore ample evidence.

"Boy's health now!" clamored Johnson. "What say name was, boy?"

"Gruger." Sam fairly panted the familiar syllables.

The toast was drunk uproariously.

So far so good for the lad who, a minute since, had been virtually fettered. But would he ever gain real freedom—and his information? He knew nothing of value as yet—and surely eleven o'clock had passed. . . .

What was Johnson mumbling? Something about a bite in the non-commissioned officers' hall. Gruger was famished; entrance to that hall offered a chance of picking up news from the easy gossip of underlings; but it also offered, he now keenly comprehended, the far likelier chance of further difficulties, fresh suspicions, new delays. If, rather, he could be left alone for a while—

"I am more weary than hungry, sir."

"But you must eat."

"If you don't object, sir, I'd prefer a bed at once."

And Morgan, of all people in the world, gave Sam what he wanted! Through the table chatter, the Major shot a word across to Travers, which Gruger could not catch, and Travers nodded vigorously.

"The boy is right, sir," said Morgan to his superior. "See how worn he looks. Here!" The speaker wrapped some bread and cheese in a napkin. "Take this along with you, and so to bed." Adopting his

colder tone and bowing to Johnson, the Major continued, "You have justly intimated that I did this brave young messenger a wrong, sir. Permit my atonement. We are making a night of it by your leave: the boy meanwhile shall sleep in my own room."

Sam almost doubted his own ears. Nobody else, however, evinced astonishment. In their convivial state, all applauded what seemed a generous reparation, and Johnson commended Morgan as a noble fellow, and proposed his health.

To Gruger the Major said, "Come along." He took up a candlestick.

Almost before he realized what was happening, Sam passed through the doorway. The cavernous eyes of the Welshman regarded his attendant's every step, while, from the mess room, Johnson's quavering voice struck into song:

> "To Anacreon in Heav'n, where he sat in full glee,
> A few sons of Harmony sent a petition——"

A stimulating air, but it began low and ran high. Few throats could comfortably master it. The commander was a complete incompetent; but he sang it, anyhow.

"This way," said Morgan.

He began to mount a vaulted flight of steps that must lead to quarters immediately above the apartment just quitted. He held aloft the candle, which was nearing its end, so that grease fell on his red sleeve and his shadow was fantastically dwarfed against the stone steps.

Sam was troubled; the turn of events seemed too good to be true. Was he to be privately confronted with some evidence of guilt and a confession wrung from him by secret torture?

He wondered about a score of possibilities. Suppose Valdivia had escaped from his captor and should reach the fort! Suppose Bill lay murdered somewhere this side of Sandy Beach! Had Sam's message reached Wayne? If it had, had he acted on it? What, anyhow, did this ascent into the heart of the fortress portend?

They came to a landing that faced a passage along which three or four doors were darkly visible. Of these Morgan pushed one open. He stood aside, motioned Gruger to enter.

"Here is my humble nook. Take your ease in it."

A little room. Two windows, side by side and opposite the door, both shuttered. Against one wall, a highboy; against another, a fourposter bed hung with gay chintz. Nothing hinted at the profession of its customary occupant except his sword, resting in a corner, and a row of military boots standing stiff in heavy trees.

By a sheer effort of the will Gruger answered in his own favor all those doubts which had oppressed him. He *had* to believe if he was to keep heart!

Morgan was setting down the candlestick atop the highboy. He stood between Gruger and the door:

"Is there aught more I can do for you?"

He could go, thought Sam, and the sooner the better, but that he seemed in no hurry to do. His guest could only make a sound of polite refusal.

"Voice, fiddle and flute,
No longer be mute!——"

That song rose from right underfoot.

"We are not very musical here," leered the Major, "but we choose pretty airs. You know this one?"

"No," said Gruger.

"What a pity! But you can't stop on Stony Point long without learning it: 'tis our chief's favorite. 'Twas composed, as to tune, by Mr. John Stafford Smith, and as to its words by Mr. Ralph Tomlinson, for the Anacreontic, a jovial London association meeting at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand. Dr. Samuel Johnson is sometimes there, and I have heard our great Sir Joshua Reynolds sing it."

When would this man start whatever deviltry he was up to? Or, if he was up to none, would he never go?

"Thank you," said Sam. He yawned brazenly. "But I am very weary."

Morgan evinced contrition. He moved lithely to the door and fumbled at it. "Forgive me," said he, "for keeping you from bed for a single instant. Campaigning against barbarians and boors dulls the fine edge of even a gentleman's manners. Sir, I bid you good night."

Was he really going?—He was really gone!—The door closed noiselessly behind his retreating figure.

But that door shut with a double click.—*Had the Major locked it from the outside?*

CHAPTER XXI

THAT TOWER TRAP

Sam had been left standing somewhere about the middle of the room. Now—atiptoe, so as not to betray guilty anticipation, should a suspicious host have remained a moment to listen, outside in the shadowy hall, the boy ran to the closed portal.

There was no key on this side.

On the other, then?

With infinite care, he tried the knob.

No, the door wasn't locked, after all. It opened under his gentlest pull.

Softly, he closed it again, before having got it wide enough to see anything that was on the other side. He must give Morgan time to rejoin the mess, which, as he heard, was still singing below.

Gruger's candle was by now sadly shrunken, and he carried not so much as a tinder-box. Well, that could not be helped. He tried the window shutters: they, anyhow, were locked from the outside. They must, he calculated, give upon a roof, or there would have been no point in securing them.

What did it all mean? He mistrusted Morgan's sudden change of front, and yet— And yet he had no choice: he must either remain here until morning and lose everything of his plans, or act upon the assumption that the change was bona fide.

The candle burned lower. What time was it now? From underfoot, all the officers evidently joining in, came the chorus of that interminable drinking-song:

"And *long* may the sons of Anacreon entwine——"

Gruger hated the tune. How should he know that, thirty-five years later, one Francis Scott Key—held on a British ship before Baltimore—would compose a poem which, set to this very air on the flute of Harrisburgh's George Heisely, was destined, as "The Star Spangled Banner," to become the Republic's national anthem? Sam was busy picturing an expectant Wayne and his vainly waiting soldiery. Yet the chorus had one possible advantage: it would deafen its participants to all sounds from above.

He'd waited long enough. Holding his candle behind a panel, he reopened the door bit by bit, a quarter-inch at a time. The passage seemed empty; he slipped into it. The mess hall melody bawled on. Whither now?

He was probably in the tower that formed the center of the fort. If he could gain the roof surrounding it, he might spy out the unfinished bastion. Limping a little because of his wrenched leg, he tried the farthest door from Morgan's. This, too, was keyless! It yielded to his feverish touch, and he passed beyond it.

At first he saw but one thing: a window closed despite this sultry weather, yet unshuttered. He hopped thither, pausing merely to place his candle on the floor, whence it would shed the minimum of light through the panes. Fortune favored him: beyond this window stretched the flat roof he had been hoping for.

Then he looked about him; here was some sort of office: a low and well-worn couch, to be sure; but also a desk, left open in the careless manner prevalent among this self-confident garrison, and bulging with papers; a stack of rockets—those used, of course, for the nightly signals to the frigates in the Hudson and troops at Verplanck's across the water. Maps, too, there were: one a plan on parchment, wafered to the wall. This must be Lieutenant-Colonel Johnson's own executive workroom, and that plan must be just the thing of all others Sam wanted: the plan of these fortifications.

It was all exactly as his first wild hopes had desired, exactly as if he had set the stage for himself. His spirits bounded.

But was there time?

Well, even to that question, there seemed to be an auspicious answer. Here stood an enormous grandfather's clock: Gruger had never seen one so large. Full ten feet high it rose, proportionately wide, and with a broad door down its middle topped by a circle of glass that was like an eye.

What time?

The candle flickered badly, but Sam could read the clock dial. Its hands registered midnight—the hour that, in his overheard talk with Washington, Wayne had set for an assault, if ever assault were to be attempted.

Mid——

But there was no ticking issuing from the clock. The thing wasn't going!

Gruger listened.

"And LONG may——"

That drunken chorus rattled through the heavy planks of the floor, yet there were musical rests between certain bars, and in those intervals there issued not a sound from the timepiece. Sam even went to it and shoved an ear against its door: no—nothing but silence. These slovenly soldiers couldn't even wind their clocks!

He couldn't guess exactly how long ago this one had run down, and he would waste no more precious seconds in speculation. Instead, he hurried to the wall and tore down the parchment chart. He spread it on the floor beside his dying light and, by expiring flickerings, made a rapid examination.

Sure enough: the military architect's plan. The old fort in the middle: black ink. The new wings at the sides: red. Better yet, these latter had been covered here and there by lines drawn with a blue crayon, without doubt made from day to day as record of each day's progress in actual building. One projection was thus shown to be completed, its fellow not much more than begun.

And that one! An arrow in a corner of the parchment indicated north and south: *it was the south bastion that was unfinished.* Still kneeling, Sam looked at the window. He knew that the fort faced due east, and his window, he could now tell, was over the fort's main entrance; therefore, the point for attack lay to his right.

He began to fold up the plan. He must take it with him if he tried to escape, in case——

How quiet everything was! He realized—he had

for a few fleeting moments been too preoccupied to realize it sooner—that that endless song downstairs had at last ceased. Well, what if the hour that Wayne preferred for an attack *had* gone by? It couldn't have passed very long ago, and even Wayne, were he planning an assault, would wait a little while. Gruger must get to the roof, fire one of those rockets, perhaps find some means of lowering himself, and then run for it. That, or remain here as he had boasted to Bill. Late, yet still perhaps possible. He rose, stuffing the plan under his coat.

"I think I have a plenty of evidence to convict you *now*."

Sam spun around.

No chance to roll under the couch, though. The door of that huge grandfather's clock had opened, and out of it was stepping black-browed Major Morgan.

CHAPTER XXII

"WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE CLOCK?"

This, then, was the situation at Stony Point in the middle of the night of July 15th to 16th, 1779:

Below, Wayne and his American troops had hidden in the woods and crouched for their surprise attack—among them the boy Bill Blunston going into action with the knowledge not only that he must do his share of fighting against the common enemy, but that his life was in peril at the hands of his fellow soldier Eben Jones, a criminal whose enmity he had incurred, and whose enmity few could incur and escape.

Above, in the chief tower room of the British fort, Sam Gruger, Wayne's drummer turned American spy, held what was indispensable to the American's success: a knowledge of which of these works' two bastions was the one that assault could take. He held it, and yet was unable to use it.

"I think I have a plenty of evidence to convict you *now!*"

Morgan's words were an accusation. His tone was condemnation complete.

Too late the lad realized how thoroughly his purpose had been divined by his enemy. The Major had served his suspicions under pretense of making amends for them—ostensibly, even ostentatiously, left Sam

unobserved in an unlocked bedchamber—left also the way thence and hither clear for any trespasser with any wit—merely walked down the long hall to the one room which a spy would surely seek—set this trap and then, by means of that peephole in the clock-door, set himself to watch it.

But *was* all this realized quite too late?

The man's sword was back there where he slept, and soldiers didn't go armed to dinner. Never had Gruger thought faster, and never did his brain stand him in better stead. Use the pistol he carried, he dared not: it would give the alarm. But he marked the lay of the land, the distance between him and Morgan, the position of that stack of rockets. The candle stump flickered on the floor beside Sam's unlamed foot. He looked elaborately over shoulder at the room's sole window: the Major stood now between him and the door. The——

"None of that!"

Morgan's mind was agile, too, yet not so agile as the boy's, nor as the boy's body. Gruger's boot crashed the already dying light: the room was plunged in utter dark.

He sprang.

Not, however, straight backward for the casement. That would seem his sure route and would therefore be followed by the officer. Sam sprang to one side—groped for and found something that he badly wanted.

He had guessed Morgan's instant thought to a nicety—calculated his opponent's course as perfectly as Morgan had earlier calculated Gruger's. On a line

with the window, the Major leaped into the dark for the spot where he had last seen his victim—leaped against nothingness, and fell.

The noise of his tumble declared his exact whereabouts. Sam had a rocket in his grip!

That was before the day of Sir William Congreve's invention which harnessed such pyrotechnic pieces to doing the work of explosive shells and the setting fire of enemies' buildings; but the signal rocket of the late 1770's could, as the present instance proved, become a strange and effective weapon. Its head, with a skull of sheet iron, rarely weighed less than three pounds, and its stick was stout. It was, therefore, with a formidable instrument that Sam struck.

He struck home. Not a direct hit, he at once felt, and so not fatal. But enough: he could hear Morgan breathing stertorously.

Now for the window at last!

He was about to make a heedless rush to it, when another sound was added to the gasps of the unconscious man—some sound from the hall. That long corridor behind the shut but unlocked and keyless portal was a perfect sound conductor: footsteps were ascending to it by the stairs up which Morgan had conducted Sam.

As quietly now as he could in the gloom, Gruger pursued his quest, but as rapidly as caution allowed. He missed his destination—found it. The steps reached the hall. Sam grasped the window sash and, with all his might, shoved upward.

It didn't budge—it *wouldn't* budge. Either last

night's rain had warped the wood, or else it had been nailed shut. And he could hear the oncomers' voices, apparently at Morgan's bedroom.

"Major!"—An unfamiliar croak.

"Morgan!"—But that sounded like the choleric Captain Travers.—"Not here. Nor the boy!"

"I can't believe that lad's really a——"

"Wait a bit. Morgan suspected he'd try to rifle Johnson's office."

Sweat gushing from every pore, Sam made another effort. He strained his muscles to their uttermost, and strained in vain.

Suddenly he surrendered the struggle. He would have to stay here—hide.

The exact place of every piece of furniture blazed on the map of his memory, and he recalled the couch. He might find momentary sanctuary under it. Of course there was the clock: apparently Morgan had not confided his idea of hiding there to Travers. But there was also the body of the unconscious Morgan to be got rid of, and Sam had better be discovered than that *that* should accuse him.

What followed took almost no time; but to Gruger the briefest measurement was at once longer and shorter than any commonly made: longer, because he suffered a hundred fears and uncertainties during it; shorter, because there was so much to be done. The voices drew very near:

"He won't come up?"

"Johnson? Egad, you saw him! I have the beast too boozed to budge. No, our man-of-sentiment won't again interfere in favor of his poor young stranger."

A light stole under the door and across the sill.

Fortunately, Morgan was not a heavy man, and Gruger was strong. Somehow, he lifted the inanimate bulk, somehow—with a thrust and a tucking-up of the legs—thrust it into the clock. There came a jangle of weights and pendulum as they were shoved against the rear, but they were mercifully drowned by a silly quartet rebeginning that Anacreon song in the mess room below. Wide as the Major's cell was for its natural purposes, it was not wide enough to permit him to fall; he collapsed just enough to prevent—so Gruger guessed—his face showing through the peep-hole; otherwise, he was propped upright. Sam closed him in and slid beneath the couch just as the room door opened and light flooded the apartment.

Boots were all he could see, but he could hear, of course, everything:

"Not here, either: neither of 'em."

"I don't understand it."

"The boy should have been questioned further downstairs."

"While Johnson was there to protect him—or up here, for that matter, so long as he didn't convict himself and had a not quite helpless Johnson to shout for?"

That light was stronger than any candle's; it was, Gruger could smell it now, a pineknot torch.

"Well, you see for yourself——"

That couch was frightfully low and narrow. Sam was as if shut in a coffin with open sides. He could scarcely move a muscle, save at risk of betrayal.

"—wherever they may be, they are not here. We

had best try the other rooms, and, if we draw blank, turn out the guard."

"I don't want to hurry too much about that," said Travers, evidently beginning to doubt his course. "In case there is any mistake, I don't want a reprimand to-morrow morning from a liverish Johnson."

The boots shuffled—turned. Were they to leave and give Gruger another chance? His heart nearly burst with suspense. He heard a big hand descend upon the immediately rattling knob to the hall door.

But any hope he entertained was then straightway shattered. The voice of Travers spoke again—and spoke in laughing triumph:

"Look there! Wherever they are now, at least the boy has been here, and he's a spy. Look, I bid you! No, not only that candle end on the floor! Here, beside it: see."

From his concealment, Sam sickly saw fingers picking something up. In his peregrinations across this room, he had dropped that plan of the fort, and these men had found it:

"Note the rent corners. Somebody has torn it from the wall there, beside the old man's desk, where it always hung."

"The guard!" cried the second officer, at last all shrill conviction. "Nobody'd do that except a spy. This *is* serious. We must call the guard, man!"

Again Sam's spirits vaulted to a sanguine pitch. If these fellows both went out, giving him another half-minute alone in this room, he might at least smash the window panes, then make a rush and a dive, even if fatal, for liberty. It would be desperate, but cap-

ture was the sure preliminary to certain death, and the guard would tumble everything upside down until they found him. He wished he had made that dive at the first tokens of search.

But yet again was buoyancy to be transmuted into dread. A breathless pause had filled the room after that last speech. Probably the Captain was loath to leave for underlings the honors of a friend's rescue—supposing Morgan to be anywhere near and in trouble—or the glory entailed in the capture of a spy. The man's speech broke forth sharply:

"What's gone wrong with the clock?"

"Eh?"

"I say the clock's stopped."

"What of that?"

"Listen!"

Another pause—more awful than anything yet. Separated from his enemies by so little space, Sam made sure that, since they could not hear the clock's ticking, long since terminated, they must easily detect the mighty poundings of his panic heart: the mess room quartet was silent.

Travers' companion spoke:

"Yes, it has stopped; but what of that? Come—come: the guard! Will you fret about a rundown clock at such a crisis?"

Sam surmised that the one man tugged at the other's sleeve. Were he only sufficiently persuasive——

No use!

"Wait!" A thud against a thin panel: that would be the pressure of the suspicious Captain's palm. "With my own eyes, I saw Johnson wind it before he

went down to dinner. There's something precious odd here. Let me go, Fielding: we shall have a look inside."

Sam's brain reeled—then raced. If they found *that,* they wouldn't leave this room. They would call the guard from where they stood—begin ransacking on their own account—and then——

It was to be over, anyhow—the suspense.

It *was* over at last. It was over!

For the clock struck.

But as it had never struck ere this. Evidently, Travers jerked open the panel; evidently, the unconscious Morgan had toppled against it. Certainly, his body lurched forward, a dead weight. The lower woodwork caught and held his knees, yet his knees only. The resulting leverage toppled over case and contents, human and mechanical. Down upon both the searchers crashed and smashed the entire tall structure with what it had held: a mass of man, splintering mahogany, jangling wires, sonorous bells and springs which, thus released, beat like frightened swallows against walls and ceiling.

The clock struck—the floor.

CHAPTER XXIII

BATTLE ALOFT

That concussion was summons enough for any guard! It was a tremendous impact, setting up an equally tremendous uproar; but it gave Sam one slight advantage that he was not slow to seize. He had, at last, all his wits about him; doubt being over, and the worst being known, he was master of himself.

He saw enough, in the general smash-up, to understand immediately that his adversaries were temporarily entangled, and at once his lank form rolled from under the couch. He rose.

Not that he at first remained upright. On the contrary, he tripped amid the scattered débris, fell, rose again: but rose with the resilience of a hard-hit tennis ball.

A cloud of fine dust filled the air. At Gruger's feet —with difficulty he made it out amid that brown mist —lay a reviling Morgan, who choked out curses from a tangle of cords, chains and clock weights that almost equally enmeshed his fellow officers.

This was the tableau that the fallen torch presented to the once more erect Sam; but it was a tableau for a trice only. While yet that miniature earthquake's din echoed through the room and beyond, indeed, just as voices of startled inquiry rose from belowstairs, and a

rush of boots beat into the lower hall—Gruger sought a weapon.

His hand shot to his belt at first; but José's pistol was gone, fallen, doubtless, under the couch, whence there was no twinkle of time to rescue it. Gone, too, was Sam's recently acquired rocket.

Well, he snatched another!

"Help! Help, below there!"

One of the fallen Britishers let out that plea, though which one it was Gruger didn't stop to calculate.

"The guard!" cried the second fallen man, and added: "He's a spy!"

"Help!" echoed the first.

The struggling fellows were now halloing at the top of their lungs, not because they feared that this boy might injure them; but because, since he had so far outwitted their schemes, he might yet, they dreaded, very well escape.

Morgan was sitting up amongst the smashed oddments of that big grandfather's clock and desperately tugged at a web of ropes wound about his ankles. His companions, wrenched out of stupefaction by Gruger's move, had got clear at last of their own impediments and were stooping for a dart at the redheaded intruder. Neither showed firearms, but Travers had rescued the pineknot, and it was a veritable mace of Hercules.

Against that, what avail could even this stout rocket be?

Sam did think of running low and butting the Captain, but already a crowd of other officers from the mess room, or soldiers from the guard hall, was

audibly mounting the stairs. On one side, here in the commander's office, Fielding, who proved to be a big chap with a crafty eye and a knowing air, held aloft a huge clock weight which he was prepared to throw and which would undoubtedly smash the brains out of any skull it struck. On the other side, there was nothing except the blank wall.

Nevertheless, Sam knew that behind him stood that stubborn window. How he wished that he had dived through it before these Lobsters——

He risked one calculating glance backward. Instantly Fielding's hand bolted forward and released the clock weight; the Captain instantly swung his torch.

But that instant was a half instant too late. The lad had made his decision and acted upon it. He was already in air. As if he were an arrow shot from a bow, he dove straight through the window, glass and all.

A rending sound followed. Followed another vast bump, which was succeeded by a series of crystalline tinklings, and by semi-darkness, too.

Gruger found himself sprawling on that flat roof of the fort which amounted to a porch and which surrounded, as he had surmised, the tower. He was chiefly conscious that something hung like a yoke around his shoulders: he had carried the entire window sash along with him in his dive for freedom.

Was he hurt? There existed no opportunity to determine that. A warm wetness he did feel on his hands, but those hands still clasped the rocket that was his only hope of fulfilling his mission.

In his confused ears a continuous roaring sounded, almost deafening him. It was accentuated, it was reënforced, by vociferations from the room he had left so strangely. Through the hole his exit had bored there, he could see them: they were a crowd of momentarily hesitant, but entirely potential, pursuers.

They were that for the space of one breath. The next labored breath Sam drew, and they were massing through the way he had blazed for them—and for himself.

But these huntsmen were impeding one another, because each of them wanted to be first to get out and reach the spy. Should Sam—it was close at hand—drop over the parapet?

In a flash of time, he debated that project, and decided against it. He would not attempt it yet, anyhow. Why? Because, if Wayne were indeed still waiting word from him below there, patience must be strained to the breaking point—and his commander's patience was far from being proverbial. Bill would be at Wayne's hand, wouldn't he? If Sam, up here, could somehow still secure fire, he might even yet give the promised signal. Yes, he would pursue his desperate scheme yet a step further—and only then jump and take the slim remaining chances for his personal escape.

He turned. He ran along the roof southward, making exactly enough sound purposely to attract the mob of officers and guards that now poured out of the office onto the roof. He doubled, and returned amid a sheaf of chimney pots. Then he sprinted south again but now more noiselessly.

Finally he assured himself that he must be atop of the unfinished bastion. Why, here he was stumbling over a heap of loose masonry presumably left by soldier builders for the beginnings of to-morrow's tasks!

Gruger rolled to the farther side of that. He lay against it.

Cries rose out of the night and up from the roof of the fortress:

"Where's he gone?"

"He's jumped over!"

"No. The sentries are all around, down there. Call to them. They'd have——"

"Not a bit of it! Come this way!"

"But *I* saw him go *that!*"

Bent low behind the mound of loose stone, Gruger selected from it a piece of considerable bulk. He petitioned Heaven for no escape now—he prayed only for that sole conjunction of events which would perhaps enable him to execute his wild plan for communicating his news to Wayne and so helping the Colonies' cause. He petitioned for it, and his petition was suddenly granted.

The still torch-bearing Captain Travers came his way—and saw him. Sam was balancing the stone in ready hand. Travers gaped, then spread his jaws to sound the veteran huntsman's view-halloo.

The warning was given—but by the boy, and not by Travers. Sam's missile caught the Captain across his opened mouth before ever a sound issued from its capacious orifice.

Down he went. As he sank, Sam—careless of

everything else—snatched the careening pineknot that dropped from the amazed dragoon's relaxed hand.

Its flame placed him in full view of the other oncoming enemies, who, thus attracted, swarmed forward from every side. Before their arrival, there manifestly remained, however, something over a second of freedom to the boy. He employed it rather by offering his life than by trying to save himself.

That three pounds of fireworks which he carried had a cylindrical headpiece filled with gunpowder, and the metal disk closing the case's bottom was pierced by one opening, into which the stick fitted, and another from which protruded a highly charged fuse. While yet the mob surged on toward him, and while yet the flaming torch lit up his red hair, freckled face, and staring green eyes, Sam thrust the rocket's rod ever so lightly into the stone pile, tilted the top meticulously southward—and fired the fuse.

Then only did he spin about and face his hunters: a stag at bay. Behind him, the rocket exploded. It soared, he knew, due south. But the pack of redcoats closed around him although he employed the clubbing pineknot manfully.

He was swept to the roof under half a dozen men. He was again a captive: a spy taken in the act. He was, according to the language of that rude period and place, "fit fruit for the gallows-tree."

CHAPTER XXIV

ONE STREAK OF LIGHT

Eleven o'clock at Spring Steel's, if you please! An outward quiet reigned everywhere.

The night was dark, but balmy; it was sweet with the scent of "green things growing" and disturbed, when at all, only by low underbrush whispers, as rabbits rustled from their warrens toward far farms' lettuce-patches, or when a red fox started on his nocturnal raid of some distant chicken yard. Merely the gentlest of breezes blew, and this from the hills toward the unseen river. Although a few lights twinkled where the Hudson's tide flowed strongest and a few over at Verplanck's on the eastern shore, no stranger would have guessed them to mark hostile frigates or enemy encampment. Surely that black mountain scarp of Stony Point slept without ever a dream to disturb it. This plantation of hickories and chestnut trees: certainly it lay deserted. To every uninformed seeming, over woods and water there dozed absolute tranquillity.

And yet, whatever conditions might prevail aboard ship, in camp, or at the overhanging fort, about and through the ordered hiding place of the Colonial Light Infantry nervous tension tore at thirteen hundred and fifty men; vigorous vigilance surrounded them. No chance wayfarer approached, but, had he done so,

pickets would have had him prisoner at once; he would have been collared noiselessly by invisible hands. The moment for the American advance was nearing.

In the all-pervading gloom, Bill Blunston stood beside Wayne and some other officers at the farthest forward rim of trees.

"Is it time, sir?" asked somebody.

"A'most," said Wayne.

"We have near two mile to go to the marsh," another eagerly essayed. "Had we not better——"

"*I* am in command here."

Bill's plump body shivered under the clashing of thoughts:

Should he, in spite of all proud restraints, tell of Eben's threats? No fear of battle; but this meant murder! . . . Still, shame held him. Jones, for all his record, known and surmised, was a braggart-bully—he might not, anyhow, find him in the fight. Blunston had that pistol—would dare to use it, once the expedition's surprise attack declared itself—could use his knife before that.—If struck from behind? Well, he just dared not take his story to Wayne, whatever was to happen else.

Then there was, *or had been,* Sam. Could he really be dead? Might he not still have some hours of life left him, even if condemned, atop that inky height? He expected an attack: wouldn't his ingenious resourcefulness, which had never yet failed, send the agreed sign? This morning he had been so full of life—and yet Bill well knew how, in war, the merest pulse beat was all that divided vigorous existence from motionless mortality.

He longed for the assault. He wanted the clash of battle, the impact of disciplined onslaught upon military resistance—he wanted action to end uncertainty. If only Wayne would give the order to go ahead——

He gave it!

"Bring out your men and start. We stop at the hill-foot for a five minutes' rest—no more. And never forget it is the north bastion that is weak—that it is the *north* bastion we are attacking. All the way up the hill, bear lightly to the north. Then, when you shall have cleared the enemy's outposts, strike *due* northward."

Nothing could have borne better testimony to Wayne's genius for foresight and discipline than that last portion of the miraculous march. Providence favored, but the human commander had planned to the minutest iota of conjecture; every officer was scrupulously instructed in all that he should do—and scrupulously did it.

In the dark, the expedition issued from the wood without confusion, without one man wandering from his company, without the company losing contact with its fellows. A mile and a half they went.

They went with marvelous quiet, over a difficult track; they crossed the marsh at the sole safe time, almost under the very guns of ships of war that the slightest untoward commotion would have startled into fatal broadsides. Along with every other mount, Butter-Tubs had been left in charge of a small detail under the trees: Wayne walked between advance scouts and van, Bill puffing close after him. Some unforeseen delays were of course inevitable; but the

adventurers reached the base of Stony Point not much behind schedule—12:12.

"Fetch the column commanders and the leaders of—their own name is descriptive enough of them: the Forlorn Hopes."

Blunston groped his way and did his duty. While the men rested as much as their eagerness would let them rest, Wayne yet again went over his instructions to his officers:

"The Forlorn Hopes first, then the two columns. You will order fixed bayonets before you repeat my order to advance. Not an unnecessary word, and no word uttered loudly. Command silence even during the actual encounter—cheers are forbid until our van is inside the main works and the watchword is passed: 'The fort's our own.' Success depends entirely upon an utter surprise of at least their outposts. Keep in touch with me; I shall charge at the head of your regiment, Colonel Febiger, in the right column" . . .

Bill felt valiantly of knife and pistol. He raised his gaze to the heights. They faded into darkness, sable hill blending into jet sky. Anything could happen in such obscurity; but if he lived to attain that summit—if he weren't found and finished by Eben at the first collision and recoil—he would avenge Sam Gruger. The slopes looked lifeless, the fort must be contentedly torpid.

". . . and again and always"—Wayne drew to his conclusion—"remember that it is the *north* bastion we must assail. Knowing this hill's position and slope, you cannot lose your sense of direction. North! And now——"

Light, distant, but clear, interrupted him. A narrow, arching streak of fire rose from Stony Point's hidden crest toward which, like Blunston's, the eyes of every officer were concentrated. That beam slashed the heavens loftily, but its yellow shaft bent like a bow out of the north and descended toward, and was lost in, the southern horizon.

Low-voiced babel broke out in the group:

"That's a signal to the ships!"

"It's the usual night one."

"No, the fort's been warned!"

The light gone, double darkness had descended.

"They know we're——"

"No matter what it is," said Wayne definitively, "we will go forward now!"

But Bill dared disobedience—open disobedience, for the first occasion in his service.

*"P-p-*PLEASE! It's Sa-am—Sam Gruger. It's y-your d-drummer. And he says st-strike at the *south!"*

For in the streak of flame Blunston had read revelation. Although by this public act Sam must have revealed his true business to those British and surrendered himself to death, yet he did live a moment ago—was unmistakably up there. His characteristic ingenuity had not failed, after all.

Officers laughed. Not Wayne, however. He spoke brusquely:

"What do you mean, orderly?"

In an agony of stammering, Bill tried to explain. He told of the private signal system. He told what Gruger had promised that morning. . . . Well, the

British land forces' signals to their frigates—Johnson's to Verplanck's—were invariably shot straight toward the zenith. Chance wouldn't imitate such a sign as this, all things considered. That message read:

"It is the south bastion that isn't yet fortified. When you have passed the outworks, attack the *south* bastion."

Wayne listened. Because those details about the code and the morning arrangements were so convincing, but most because their commander set the example, the officers listened, too.

"Then that Carib—your spy—lied?"

"He w-wasn't *my* spy, sir."

"He might have lied to bank me. But he well knew he would die if I chipped him up at it."

"You s-said, sir, he was tr-true to his employers. O, sir, I kn-know S-Sam, and I *know* he must some way have managed t-to——"

"Silence!"

Silence then there was, everybody breathlessly awaiting the decision, until Wayne spoke once more:

"*I* know Sammy, Blunston, too—and none of us knows that knackish Carib back yon at Sandy Beach—though he swings for this if I survive to see to it. Gentlemen, change '*north*' to '*south*' in all your orders."

Thus the born commander. It was like him: at the last he no more than hinted the process of reasoning whereby he reached his final judgment. To-night, his subordinates could guess that process, but in mere words it would never be given them.

"Forward, Forlorn Hopes! Forward, columns both!" . . .

CHAPTER XXV

AT THE BAYONET'S POINT

The American force was mounting this steep hillside. They must now, in fact, in the darkness and silence, be quite two-thirds up its height.

Bill, toiling behind Wayne at that exposed point between the advance platoon of George Knox and Febiger's regiment, could not see much; but a sort of false twilight did aid his eyes partly to accustom themselves to conditions. He chatteringly felt himself the ghost he might well soon be, climbing—with a company of ghosts—an entirely ghostly ascent.

As zealous for the fight as any of them, he yet was oppressed with a sense that they were all "forlorn hopes": the main body as truly as its scouts. And, after all, why not? There was not a single cartridge among the rank and file. They were ragged, they were weary, they were footsore, and yet they were mounting against a position heavily fortified, whatever the condition of that unfinished bastion, and one manned almost entirely by veterans.

True—all of it. And yet, he could feel this also, every mother's son among his comrades was seemingly forging upward to likely death willingly, even indomitably.

Orders and the will to obey them to the contrary

notwithstanding, perfect quiet was, of course, impossible.

Blunston heard again and again the clatter of rolling stones set in motion by the most cautious, yet necessarily hurried and unseeing, steps. Dry twigs snapped clamorously. Many a man slipped—never, it seemed, in silence.

Nevertheless, the ascent was a miracle of collective self-control. Complaints were rarely more than whispered; low-voiced were those rude jokes which men, and especially American men, seem desperately impelled to make when risking death in company.

With any less alarm, no thirteen hundred soldiers in all the veteran armies of the Old World could have gone up that abrupt height, nor could they have gone more successfully. Still, no least sign that their advent was expected—was forewarned—issued downward from the dark heights above.

Once Bill dared to address again the half-seen form of his commander:

"D-do you th-think, sir, th-that signal g-g-got Sam into any t-trouble?"

He knew it must have—in his inmost soul he knew it—but he desperately wanted consolation.

However, he was destined to receive none.

"Nay," said Wayne, "all's truff wi' him now for sure! The wonder for him and the mercy for us is that it didn't come to him afore he could somehow communicate by rocket.—But, O, lad"—the tone softened and descended to a level where it would be audible only to Bill—"we mustn't think o' sick matters now: we mun watch, going forward anyhow, and try

determine whether t' enemy has read his signal as well as we-uns."

Despondency reclaimed Blunston, and with it came, as it usually does, a physical weariness. They should now be as near the enemy's outer works as even this force dared go before its ultimate rush.

Wayne ordered another brief rest—the last for himself and his men before the coming conflict. Bill, in this pause, could hear the breathing of the entire expedition, or so he thought, as if it were the distant sound of ocean waves on some gentle shore.

It was another thing entirely that Wayne's keen ears detected.

"Listen!" he breathed at his orderly's ear, and his grasp closed tightly around Blunston's nearer arm.

"F-for what, sir?"

"Pst!"

At first, Bill's auditory powers could detect—although he exercised them to the limit of their ability—only that labored breathing of a host of men. But, an instant later, through the pine-scented night, he heard from somewhere in front, but also overhead—somewhere between sky and earth—the rolling of a confused clamor, far away, yet none the less certain.

"Ha!" gasped Wayne, exactly as if he smelled a tempting dish of food. "There is life at last."

He instantly dispatched one of the men nearest him with a message to Gibbon's particular Forlorn Hope on the left:

"And bid them be careful of mista'ing friend for foe when, after getting in touch with the enemy, as 'twill be soon now, our own forces converge."

To Blunston a somewhat similar commission was entrusted:

"Say also to Knox that we follow close. He's to go on now at the double-quick!"

Stifling all other emotions, Bill rushed right ahead over a stretch of open ground which here mounted between him and the spot where Knox and his score of daring fellows ought to be waiting. With such singleness of purpose did the boy indeed go, that he did not see—as for that matter nobody else did—one dark figure immediately detach itself, unordered, from the Headquarters Company back of Wayne and before Febiger's command—detach itself and glide after Bill.

The boy literally stumbled upon those men whom Knox officered. They were up and away—muskets at hips, bayonets not four feet above ground—while yet his lips formed their final word.

He could not have turned had he wanted to, for they swept him with them. He would not have turned if he could, for, at this last crisis, all his thoughts ran to the coming encounter—to the fight he had so desired—to the promiscuous and unreasoning revenge of his Sam. His physical weariness fell away magically from Blunston's bones and muscles. How could he think of himself, how could be think of the threats of a pock-marked waster?

The double-quick! No shots, no shouts, but the *bang-bang-bang* of men running in unison over earth that a day of heat had dried into veritable cement. This once throat-cutting double-quick, which he had always hated: it was nothing any more.

A hundred yards——

Two hundred——

Three!

He had no means of reckoning, or any head to reckon with, in this ecstasy of motion toward the fateful goal. Yet the charge must have come that far, though an exuberance of lightness in head and feet told him he could have gone as many miles without observable exertion.

Four——

The line was most irregular. Some men were ahead of it, some behind. But all ran their swiftest.

Five——

A cry, which was a startled challenge, came out at them. Before answer could have been made by the attackers, even had they not been ordered to dumbness, that startled challenge was supplemented by a frightened flash—a spurt and flight of flame: a shot. There was a thump and a clattering of pebbles: not the fall of a wounded soldier—one of the Colonials farthest in advance had tumbled into a trench or collided with a breastwork. More cries tore the dark then, and, as surprised sentries retreated, a hail of scattered explosions was launched from somewhere just beyond.

Here then were at last the British outposts, the first of those military works above the Hudson that allowed Sir Henry Clinton to ravage neighboring Connecticut. Contact had finally been made with the enemy.

Bill raced into a whirlpool of fighting shadows. The withholding of ammunition from the Americans had been wise in that it prevented any nervous forewarning—was still wise because the Colonials, having

been forced to consider their weapons as clubs and lances, readily so employed them, whereas the muskets of their surprised opponents were mostly only halfway to shoulder and could be easily knocked up or down before they could be effectively employed. Butts fell on heads—bayonet blades lunged. The enemy had jumped bravely from their entrenchments; couples—quartets—were engaged in literal hand-to-hand encounters.

It was all a swirl of madness in the dark. Bill found that somehow—exactly how he did not know—his knife was in his sudden grasp. Steel whizzed by him, blows were struck, he was deafened by wild yells.

Doggedly he ploughed forward, seeking some concrete enemy. Hurtling bodies knocked him hither and thither; but he forebore to strike until he could distinguish companions-in-arms from British enemies.

Thus he comported himself for a few seconds, but not for long. All at once, his head was seized and jerked backward, while his feet, toes upward, pitched in the opposite direction. His knife dropped from his clawing fingers, nor could he then recover any other means of defense. A grip had fastened on his jacket collar from behind. He was being dragged away, as impotent as any chicken in the claws of a hawk.

"Hi!—H-hi!"

What good were his cries in the midst of such a human whirlpool? To the very fringe of the fighting he was hauled—there and beyond it. Then he was flung upon his knees.

Released thus, he could at least look up. He had been tossed beside a natural cairn that was like some

savage sacrificial altar. The night permitted him to see this much. It permitted him to see, also, that, twenty yards away, his comrades still battled. The issue there was, however, not to be calculated; here, if unable to distinguish his captor's features, nor anything of his expression, Blunston at least made out enough, and more than enough, for purposes of horrified identification.

Close over him leaned—Eben Jones!

"Well, I've *got* you!" that creature bellowed through all the welter of war.

His musket was discarded, but not his bayonet. The point of that Bill immediately felt at his throat.

Well, then, his pistol—once José's—Valdivia's? The problem was to draw it! If Bill might somehow gain the least fraction of delay, that pistol might yet save him.

"W-w-will you——"

He started his speech uncertainly, with no idea of what he was about to say. Nevertheless, his voice ended on another note. He detected, in the darkness, something approaching behind Jones which supplied sure speech. Blunston pointed wildly and incontinently concluded:

"Look out—Look there!—Look back of you!"

Those phrases were indubitably genuine. They were the instinctive warning shriek, truly uttered, of one soldier to an endangered comrade bearing the same uniform. They veraciously registered the sinking of a purely private quarrel in the flood of danger to a general cause.

Eben Jones wheeled. Flung into this backwash by

some strange eddy of the contest, a man, whose shako declared him British even in that enveloping gloom, stood a pace away—no more than that—and was already raising his musket to club out Eben's brains.

All that followed passed as of one movement. Jones was powerless; but Blunston leaned aside—drew —fired. And it was not Jones who fell: it was the Englishman.

Bill, from sheer reaction, reeled onto his hands. Eben stood stockstill.

"You done that a-purpose?"

"Of course. I g-guess I can shoot! Oh, is he d-dead?"

The battle had swept on uphill. They could hear each other plainly now.

"Don't worry your noodle about that: you ain't such a prize marksman. Dead? Can't you see him kick?" Eben again drew close to Bill, the bare bayonet dangling. "What I want to know is: why'd you pick on him an' not me?"

"He'd have t-taken me next."

"Don't you"—Jones' features were still well-nigh invisible, but his tone had changed in its turn; it was half suspicious, but half bewildered, too—"don't you believe I'm a-goin' to kill you myself?"

"Yes," panted the uncomprehending Bill; "but he's B-British, and you're needed."

The reputed murderer, this fellow who even now had threatened murder, gasped. "You saved my life, when— You're a fool, you are!" He gasped again, like a man in physical as well as mental pain, like a

"Don't let me drop till my feet are inside the fort."

man face to face with some new and not wholly comfortable revelation. Yet it was clearly a revelation not to be disobeyed. "You—— Well, since you are, I guess I gotta be one, too."

Some quick, momentous decision was made. He retook his hold of Blunston's collar and hauled the lad to his feet, uttering the while an oath, perhaps of regret for a pleasure that his queer code forced him to forego.

"What's the m-m-matter?" gulped Blunston, still fearful, but more than ever mazed.

"None o' your business. Thank your God an' hold your tongue. I've knowed long what you've been sayin' o' me. Well, 'tain't quite all true so shut up about it after this, that's all. I said when anybody done me ill he got repaid tenfold, but I said one good turn desarves another. You've a tattling tongue, but if 'tweren't for you I wouldn't be alive to say so. So I best be a-movin' into the shindy, 'stid o' wastin' precious minutes over a milksop. Oh, I reckon even *you're* needed—som'ers else. Git back to Wayne, where your duty is, or I'll tan the hide off'n you."

The fort had opened fire, but the outworks had fallen. Under a heavy storm of grapeshot, the American columns met and ran across the remaining terrain. Wayne tottered.

"H-hit, sir?" groaned Bill that moment returned to his post.

"Only a graze. The skull. Not much, I think—Forward, Febiger!—There comes Meiggs' men, and the Forlorn Hopes are joined!—Pass that reminder

about bearing south—and nobody's to be hurted after he surrenders!" Wayne leaned heavily upon his orderly. "Blunston, your arm around my waist. . . . Loss o' blood, that's all. . . . We must win—*must!*—Don't let me drop till my feet are set inside the fort."

CHAPTER XXVI

MAD ANTHONY

Warty hands bleeding, red hair matted by a paste of dust and sweat, but green eyes none the less shining happily for a triumph that should condemn him to death, on the roof of Fortress Stony Point, Sam Gruger, disentangled from his assailants, had been placed with his back to the tower wall. He stood at a side whence he could look down into a well whose bottom formed a courtyard giving on that unfinished bastion. Although Travers' torch had been extinguished in the tussel, fresh candles, brought from the room behind Sam, supplied sufficient illumination: their neighbors' light, too, issued from behind the smashed window.

"You may as well make an end of me, for I'll tell you naught."

The boy faced that ring of enemy faces flushed by wine and anger—faced also Morgan's lowering face gone clear sober, but remaining cold cruel.

"He's right," assented Travers, eager for blood. "We'll take him down to Johnson for court-martial—drumhead court-martial—the old man's sense enough left for that, if we're quick about it."

Morgan spoke. Unpopular he seemed to be among his fellows here, but his hard head gave him a certain authority:

"Johnson? Never! He's in a stupor by now: you all know him. We shall have to act in this contingency for ourselves."

Sam didn't care. He had, anyhow, sent up his signal, and these fellows' unanswered inquiries showed that, far from suspecting its invitation for an attack, they thought it merely an effort to tell some confederate the news of Gruger's arrest and his mission's failure. Sam, in their eyes, had hoped only to gain information and bear it back to Sandy Beach next day.

Well, if only Wayne had not tired of waiting in the valley and withdrawn, the assault was safe!

Sam's own life, though? What about that?

Ah, there was another matter! The lad did wonder whether his commander might not have moved closer to Spring Steel's. But even were Wayne and his troops at the very foot of Stony Point—nay, had they by any chance started in defiance of Washington's stipulation and climbed high before that rocket was fired—their arrival, the lad now logically reasoned, must come too late to save his own neck.

He had said it would be otherwise, speaking that morning in the enthusiasm of his newly conceived plan. He had vaunted his ideal to Bill.—But Gruger had not met Morgan then!

No, a boy confronted by a mob of savage adults, he had postponed the inevitable as long as anybody could, by slow evasions drawing out the delay to its thinnest thread. Salvos of queries he had parried for a full half hour until, along with that of his persecutors', his own patience snapped. He simply lost

interest in these judges: let them kill him and be done with it!

"You mean we'll set up a court-martial here and now?" faltered a doubtful subaltern.

In the flickering light, Morgan's black face showed a spasm of hate: below stairs and above, this prisoner had made a chucklehead of him.

"I mean," said he, "that we long ago set up a court-martial. What else did all our cross-examination amount to? The fellow's a proved spy, and we gain nothing by further interrogation."

"Just so," Travers agreed.

"All, then, that is left us to do," Morgan concluded, "is the pronouncing of sentence—and the carrying out of it here and now."

Another subaltern murmured some technical objection, but Travers shouted him down, doubtless under the Major's instructions, and he was generally supported. The chase had roused blood-lust; the failure to wrest any valuable news from this young captive raised the mob spirit to the pitch of delirium. When men are at their worst—as they always are in war—such passions arise, and they sometimes burst the strong barriers of military law.

Was there any hesitancy left here at all? Some, perhaps. But Gruger's nerves could bear no more uncertainty.

"I am an American soldier"—he blurted out the fact that they had so long ago guessed—"and I've served my country, disguised as a British messenger inside your lines. Now then, do whatever you please with me."

He had given them excuse enough, supposing that they needed any. Led by Travers and the crafty-eyed Fielding, the drunken officers in that crowd yelled their verdict:

"Hang him!"

Over the other edge of the courtyard wall an untrimmed beam extended. Toward this Sam was instantly hauled. As if Satan himself thrust it upward from the Pit, a rope arose—ready. Amid a veritable racket of approval, Morgan formed a noose. Gruger felt the chilly coil slip around his neck.

Here was the end, then. Here——

"What's that?"

They fell back suddenly, all of his executioners, all of his recent court. Something had struck even their sodden ears.

It was a shot—a shot from somewhere down the hill.

And it was followed by many shots, by spurts of fire cleaving the darkness of the hillside—by the impact of bodies—by shouts and yells—by every sound of conflict.

"An attack!"

That was the impulsive shout of the subaltern who had first dared to wonder about the legality of this execution of a mere boy at the mandate of an entirely irregular court.

"An attack!"

The startled phrase was echoed by a score of voices, ranging from the highest tenor to the deepest bass. The torchlight flickered over faces reddened with excitement or pale with alarm. From somewhere

below and inside the fort a bugle shrilly clamored. Instantly the crowd on the roof became a churning whirlpool.

Morgan alone stood rigid. His instructions vaulted the confusion and then commanded it:

"Every man-jack of you to his post!" he bawled.

Sam glowed with a new expectation. Almost immediately, however, it was shattered. Morgan concluded:

"Get along!—I'll take care of this convicted spy at once—and then follow you."

"Terra-ah-ah!"

The bugle again!

Despite all their faults these were trained soldiers with the love of battle in them and the fixed habit of obedience. It was like a change of scene in a play, the thing that next happened—like a miracle. Had a titanic sponge been passed across that roof, the place could not have been wiped clean more rapidly. Sam swayed under the comprehension of a prodigy accomplished: each officer had his work to do in case of an attack; each officer knew what that work was, and each went straightway to do it. The roof was almost empty. All had run below, even Travers, even Fielding, to perform the particular task long since assigned him should such an emergency arise as had here indeed happened.

All, that is, except Morgan. He stood alone there with his sentenced prisoner—and he forthwith seized the fatal rope.

"This attack is your job!" he shouted, his words still soaring above all the tumult. "Well, then, may

the Devil fly away with me if I don't finish mine—if I don't finish *you!*"

Murder was in his tone. Murder was in his heart. It luridly illuminated his face. In his grasp was the instrument of murder.

But there remained something still to be attempted by his chosen victim. That rope's other end had not yet been attached, nor had Gruger's hands as yet been secured, much less his feet. He poised at the wall's extreme edge between the Welshman and the readymade gallows.

The boy dropped to his knees. With all his force he banged a shoulder against the advancing Major's shins. Across Sam's lowered back—lowered as he used to lower it at leapfrog—Morgan catapulted beyond the brink of the wall. . . .

Catapulted to what?

There was a horrid flash in which the rising lad saw the whole quick termination. Involuntarily looking down, he could not but see, by the flares of tumultuous torches whose bearers were intent only on hurrying to meet the assault, his would-be assassin's body lying very still upon the cobblestones of that courtyard fifty feet below.

Major Morgan was dead. Perhaps the Devil had truly flown away with his soul.

Daylight once more—even quiet afternoon sunshine. Their buff and blue as clean as they could make it, their hair greased first and powdered afterward, the conquering Colonials had been drawn up for review on the plateau before the fort. To the Headquarters

Company grinning Bill Blunston waddled on some errand from the commander, and, pausing directly behind Gruger, the fat boy spoke, as soldiers learn to do on parade, out of a corner of his stiffened mouth:

"After this is o-over, come a-along with me. I f-found out where the larder is, and it's f-full of f-food, and there's no g-g-guard over it y-yet, Sam!"

Gruger's freckled face struggled with a most unmilitary smile. He hid it by bending to readjust the captured drum that he had now to carry on formal occasions, until his own was brought up to him from Sandy Beach.

"I'll be with you," said he.

Back of the two boys stood Eben Jones, the perfect picture of a veteran soldier at attention. Nevertheless, his crossed eyes were alert, and his sharp ears heard:

"Be careful, Redtop," he warned, the old nickname issuing from his lips almost affectionately. "Wayne's turned this way, and he'll see you talkin'. Your reputation may be as good as mine's bad—an', if so I hope yourn's better founded on fac'—but you know Wayne won't put up with any nonsense."

Near a restored Butter-Tubs the commander stood. A bandage ran around the base of his skull and under his cocked hat; yet his wide gaze was clear, and his clothes had been cleaned—Bill Blunston had cleaned them!—from the least tokens of battle.

Regardless of Eben's warning, Sam pursued:

"Any more news?"

"Y-yes," said Bill regretfully. "José V-Valdivia somehow hooked it out of Sandy Beach l-last night, I hear, so they c-can't kill him for a liar; and they say

that f-farmer, the one whose spring-house I d-didn't rob——"

"Van Velzen?"

"S-something like that, anyhow. Well, they s-say he's disappeared, leaving a lot of papers that show he was a—a——"

"Silence in the ranks!"

That from Richard Butler. Immediately after it, Wayne's own nasal tones were heard. He faced his troops and read from a paper—a dispatch—held in his steady hands:

Headquarters,
New Windsor,
July the 16th, 1779.

Parole—Wayn.
Countersign—Light Infantry.

The Commander is Happy to Congratulate the army on the success of our army under Brigadier Gen Wayn, who Last Night, with the Corps of Light Infantry, surprised and Took the Enemy's fort at Stony Point, and with the whol Garrison, Cannon, and stors, with Very Inconsiderable loss on our side, less than One Hundred killed and Wounded. The Gen has not yet Recd the Particulars of the affair, But he has the satisfaction to learn that the officers and men in Genl Gloriously Distinguished themselves in the attack. He Requests the Brigadier and his whole Corps to Except his warmest thanks for their good Conduct and signal Bravery Manifested upon the Occasion.

Geo. Washington.

Bill's grin became shameless, nor did he care who saw or heard him:

"Th-that dispatch don't sound 's if F-Father

Ge-George thought our chief was t-too durned *c-crazy* after all, does—*does* it?"

"Well," Sam rejoined, with equal daring, "if he *is* crazy, all I can say is I wish all our generals were as mad as Mad Anthony Wayne."

"Attention!"

The order passed down the line.

"Forward——"

The flag was raised. Gruger drew his drumsticks from the belt that crossed his breast. He beat the preliminary roll.

"*—March!*"

The gray-haired fifer broke into an almost too familiar tune:

"Stay serenely on your nest;
Katy now will do her best,
All she can to make you blest——
Katy-did!"

Eau Claire State Teachers College

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